

THE ARGOSY.

APRIL, 1882.

MRS. RAVEN'S TEMPTATION.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SECRET IN THE CHIMNEY.

THE shades of evening were gathering fast. Mrs. Raven, hastening along under them, gained her home as fast as her trembling limbs would permit. She was thankful that none of the servants were about the avenue now; the older ones had retired to their sitting-room for rest and gossip, the younger ones were keeping lovers' trysts in the secluded glades of the park. Though the twilight outside was still golden with the last of the sunlight, the lamps were already burning in the hall, and its doors, and those of rooms opening upon it, stood wide open, in all the sweet gracious security of a pleasant English mansion. Mrs. Raven's now half-crouching figure, with its irregular steps and outstretched, groping hand, fell upon the peaceful picture like a blot.

She went straight to her own room and shut and locked the door, which was something that, surrounded by her well-trained, ceremonious servants, she had never done before. Throwing off her bonnet, she turned to her little étagère where her key-basket usually stood. It was there, but empty. Bewildered by this, she reflected for a moment, and then remembered that being alone, and keeping her own room through the day, she had never changed her dress. She still wore the black merino which was usually discarded for silk and crape before dinner. In the morning, she had slipped the bunch of keys into the pocket of this dress, and there they were still.

The words of the strange woman had seemed to indicate that some mysterious message, or warning, would be found written on one of the sheets of note paper ("the *top* paper") which Mrs. Raven had herself put over her laces in the drawer that same morning. If so, then it must have been there when she put it. The costly Bramah locks could not have been tampered with.

She scarcely realised what it could mean, or what she was to find. Perhaps nothing. There might be nothing to find. Of one thing she felt almost sure—that she had not put two papers into any of the drawers. The whole thing, despite the marvellous circumstantiality of the directions, might be a take-in; or a lucky guess, founded upon some accidentally overheard gossip that Mrs. Raven possessed such drawers.

With cold and hurrying fingers she fitted the key into the second drawer. Yes, sure enough there were two sheets of paper. She now remembered them directly. During her morning re-arrangement she had added the upper paper in this one instance that she might fold it in at the back of the drawer to guard from any dust a roll of white lace especially delicate. She drew the sheet of paper out and stood with it in her hand. The wax candles were alight in the heavy candelabra on her mantelshelf. But she was in no hurry now. Rather she craved a moment's respite.

Did she hear steps in the corridor, or was it her fancy? Her maid would be coming presently to take her evening instructions. She had locked her door to secure privacy, but she wished to get it open again, if possible, before anyone came to invade that privacy.

Crossing the room, and standing in front of the candle, she held up the paper close to its flame, about on a level with her own eyes.

Yes—something was growing visible! She held it closer to the candle—closer—closer. The writing was blue. Now it was quite clear: she could read it!

"If your son sends away Eldred Sloam, Evelyn Agate shall never come to Ravenscourt."

That was all. And in her high-pitched excitement she had thrust the paper so near the light, that as she read the words upon it, it caught fire in its very centre, and she was forced to drop it into the fender. She went down on her knees and tried to blow out the fire before all was reduced to ashes. She rushed to her washstand for the water-bottle. But it was too late. There was only a little heap of charred papers. And even those, in her guilty terror, she gathered into her hand, and thrust them up the chimney, out of sight.

What was it? Who was it? Who was it, inhabiting Ravenscourt, that was able to penetrate the secrets hidden within her own bosom? What should she do? Where could she go? She could not bear to remain in the familiar room, whose very furniture seemed now to be suddenly endowed with conscious life, hostile to her. She crept away to the little inner chamber where she had slept since the Squire's death, and lay down on her bed, with her face buried in the pillow.

Who could know anything about Evelyn Agate? Was it possible, she mused in her terror, that she was being made the victim of some vile conspiracy, to which that young girl herself was a party? The next moment she felt ashamed of the thought. She remembered that

while she knew all about Evelyn, Evelyn knew nothing about her—not even of her existence. Unless Frank had chanced to see her through the medium of Philip Connell, and had made some vague mention of his mother.

Frank's mother! And to think that Evelyn had never heard of her, unless it might be by that name! Mrs. Raven moaned as she lay in the darkness.

But—what possible connection could there be between Evelyn Agate and the peasant Eldred Sloam, that this threat should be held out to her? The man rose up before her sight now, with his fine figure, his well-formed, bold face, and his half-genial, half-insolent manner. She knew all the gossip connected with this man, all the scandal of the by-gone days.

Mrs. Raven had heard nothing of Eldred Sloam's suggested departure. If such a step were in contemplation, it must be the result of some sudden decision of her son's. How had other people heard of it? Apart from any self-interest, Mrs. Raven did not like the step. It had pleased her husband's trustees, and her husband later, to continue the benefits to the man that the old Squire had begun; they had lasted so many years now that he might be excused for thinking he had a sort of right to remain on the estate. It was unwise of Leonard to put old institutions at defiance, and it was unkind. Could it have been this movement of Leonard's, which rumour might have carried to the gipsy woman's ear, that suggested the warning rhyme, spoken by her at the Pitchfork.

The more Mrs. Raven thought of this possible action of Leonard's, the less she liked it. In what way it could affect herself in her private interest, she saw not, but she felt strangely uneasy. Would it be in her power to turn Leonard from his will—and when she dared give him no reason for personally wishing it? Anyway, she must try to do so.

But all this was beside the question. The invisible writing on the sheet of paper—how did it come there? It was she herself who had sent Charity Hale to fetch the paper from her desk downstairs in the morning, giving her the key to unlock the drawer where it had been kept since black-edged paper had been substituted for dainty monograms. She remembered that Charity had been quick on her errand, for she had thought at the time, how active the old woman was still. Surely Charity could not have had anything to do with it!

Just at the very moment when she had resolved to act as if everything was as simple and straightforward as it appeared on the surface, she found herself caught by some inexplicable power, which seemed to detect her unspoken motives, and to use them as a means of compassing its own secret ends. Who was this strange woman—and was she this inexplicable power in her own person, or only its agent? And what had she to do with Evelyn? Anything?

How came the deserted child, Evelyn, to have found its way to

the Agates' house? And as that name passed through her thoughts, a blush, almost a girlish blush, burned on her cheek. Again, if all her suspicions were true (and now they seemed to her to be no longer jealous fears but menacing facts, though she resolved to die rather than breathe them again), whence did Frank derive what Leonard truly called "the Raven face."

But the manner of the writing's appearance affected Mrs. Raven's nerves scarcely more than its disappearance, which yet she knew well enough to be due to nothing but her own excited eagerness. She now began to feel as if what she saw had been but the hallucination of her own heated brain. She slipped off the bed, went softly back to her boudoir, and put her hand up the chimney. Yes, there was the charred paper. At least, she had not imagined the incident: why, therefore, should she think she had imagined the words? How had they come on the paper, and who had written them? And, in sheer lack of any other outlet for suspicion, she turned it again on Charity.

There was soot on her white hands: and while she was washing it off with hasty disgust, a knock came to the door. She cried, "Come in," and only remembered it was locked when she heard the handle fruitlessly turned: and she unlocked it hastily. It was only Janet Mackay come about her usual duties. Mrs. Raven went back to her bed, and lay down. She felt alone in the whole world, nay, in the whole universe; and she cowered into the darkness as if in hopes there to be alone, even from herself.

"I'm afraid you are not well, ma'am," said the Scotch maid, kindly.

"I think I am not, Janet," she answered: "at any rate, I feel very faint and tired. I think I will go to bed." And as she rose languidly to undress, she inquired whether Mr. Raven had returned.

"No, ma'am," answered Janet. "Budd does not expect him yet."

"Will you tell Mr. Raven I wish to speak with him here when he comes in, Janet. I wish to speak with him particularly," she added. "Did you get through your work this morning?"

Now, Janet's work that morning had been the sewing of fresh lace on sundry occasional tables and brackets in the drawing-rooms. Janet answered that she had quite finished it.

"Do you remember if Charity fetched anything from the drawing-room while you were there?" asked her mistress.

Janet reflected. It is not easy to recall, at a moment's notice, the comings and goings of those who come and go about us every day. But Janet's memory served her.

"Yes, ma'am," she said; "Charity went to the cabinet in the back drawing-room, and took away some paper."

"Was she long in doing it?"

"Just half a minute, ma'am, as it seemed to me."

"That is all right," said Mrs. Raven evasively, feeling terribly that it (or that something) was all wrong.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Janet, holding up the garment her mistress had taken off, "there seems a smell of soot about this dress! Ah, here it is, all over the white cuff! How can it have got there? Could I have flicked the sleeve into the grate as I shook it?"

"Oh, never mind," cried Mrs. Raven, dropping into a chair, and feeling as if a volume of cold water was engulfing her. "Never mind that, Janet. Help me to bed, and bring me a glass of wine."

"Don't you think a drop of brandy might be better, ma'am?" said the servant, compassionately. "It will revive you best."

"Anything you like," said Mrs. Raven, "only bring it—and leave me—and don't let me be disturbed till my son comes home."

The maid obeyed in alarmed silence. She brought as large a glass of brandy as she thought it reasonable for a lady to drink, especially one so abstemious as Mrs. Raven. Her mistress swallowed it at a mouthful, and lay down with her face to the wall.

Janet Mackay shaded the candles, closed the door softly, and went back to her fellow servants. "The mistress was poorly the night," she said, in the quaint idiom which she had kept through many years of English residence.

"Maybe she walked too far this evening?" suggested Sims.

"She seems worried," said Janet; "and a bit put about, as if she'd lost something, maybe. She wants the Squire to go to her directly he comes in. She asked whether you had been moving anything in the drawing-room to-day, Charity; and whether you were long about it."

"She did, did she?" retorted Charity, in a tone of defiance. And the next minute she got up and went away.

James Sloam chanced to be present. He had some dim idea of a relationship between the old woman and himself. At any rate, she had been kind to him in his neglected childhood. But she kept him down, and he did not care to speak much before her. As soon as she closed the door his tongue was at liberty.

"The mistress took her walk to the Pitchfork this evening," he began to the others. "She went to tell them they ought not to keep the likes of that clear-voyer on respectable licensed premises. Old Worsfold got into a rare fright when he saw her come up —"

"How do you know this, James?" interrupted Mrs. Sims.

"Giles told me, ma'am; I saw him just now in the lane. And it was very awkward, he says; for while Mrs. Raven stood trimming Worsfold and his wife about harbouring the woman, she came down right upon 'em. There was a bit of a shindy among 'em, and the mistress here she walked away with her head up; and the clear-voyer, taking the change out of her gold piece, and wishing 'em a good day, followed after her. She put herself right in her path, and stood staring her in the face, and then whispered something to her and gave her head a nod, and went off by way of the cross roads. Giles was peeping round the corner of the milking-shed, and he saw Mrs.

Raven's face go ghastly white, and her lips begin to tremble. I think that must be an awful woman."

"Why, what could she have said to the mistress!" exclaimed Janet Mackay, breaking the silence which the news had caused. "That is what must have turned her queer."

"Ah, the gentry pretend not to believe in these things," commented Sims; "but they do believe in 'em when they are brought near."

Charity Hale came back to her seat. Nobody paid any heed to her, or they might have noticed the slightly tighter pursing of her thin lips, which in Charity was always a sign of triumph.

Charity had been upstairs to pay Mrs. Raven a visit. She had found the boudoir lights dimly burning, the door communicating with the bed-room open, and the bed-room in semi-darkness.

"I'm afraid you're ill, madam," she said, standing in the doorway. "Janet seemed to think you were worried, looking for something you could not find. Might I be able to help you?"

"No, no; it is nothing, Charity," said Mrs. Raven faintly. "I hope I haven't put anything wrong," observed Charity. "Janet said you were asking if I'd been in the drawing-room to-day. I only went there when you told me, madam, to get that paper for the drawers. I had to open a new packet of that paper—I hope I wasn't wrong in that?"

"Oh, no, Charity, quite right," said Mrs. Raven. "I only fancied—well—I mean I only thought something had got out of its place."

"Eh! I do hate things getting lost," said Charity. "It makes one feel as if there was a thief about the house. And if there's a thief to the fore, steal he will, though it be things of no value to any but their owner."

Charity's tone was civil—nay, almost abject. But Mrs. Raven writhed on her couch in the dark.

"Charity," she cried, "why should you grow suspicious over every trifle? Nothing has been lost. I am very ill and sorrowful, Charity. I do not wish to conceal that from you—I couldn't, perhaps, if I would; but you must not think I am blaming you, or anybody else. One may feel sad and distressed sometimes, almost causelessly."

"I'm afraid your walk this evening was too much for you, madam," said the old woman, in quite another tone.

"Perhaps it was," sighed Mrs. Raven, catching at the excuse.

"I'm sorry if I've disturbed you, madam. I've scarcely ever heard you so faint-like. There's something in your voice that minds me of the time after Master Frank was born, and I nursed ye, and ye were too sick-like to even take any pride in the baby. You and old Charity have been through a good deal together.—Well, good-night, madam," added Charity, after a lengthened silence. "I hope you'll sleep well, and be better in the morning."

Mrs. Raven was still lying as Charity had left her, when Leonard,

in obedience to the request conveyed to him, came up. Like most sickly people, he shrank from the presence of pain or suffering of any kind ; almost resenting it.

"Well, mother," was his greeting, "what is the matter ? What do you want me for ? I hope you are not ill." Like Charity, he did not advance into the darkened room, but paused at the door.

"Come in, Leonard," said his mother, in a weak, muffled voice. "Come in, and sit here beside me."

He obeyed ungraciously, sitting down on a chair about a yard from the couch ; but he stretched out no caressing finger towards the poor hands writhing within his reach. He had inherited his mother's cold nature, and been bred in his mother's ways. He was her other self, and now she found there was no comfort in him.

"Any news ?" she asked.

"News—no," he answered. "And you are better without news, mother, if you are ill. It is no news, I'm sure, that I find everything everywhere in a dreadfully loose and neglected condition. But I'll soon put matters straight enough."

"Leonard," she said, "do not be too hasty. Do not be too severe on the poor people for ways which your father's easy habits led them into."

"They must all go," he said, hardly. "It is bad enough to have patience with the result of old-fashioned farming, without bothering oneself with old-fashioned labourers into the bargain. To-morrow I discharge the first on the list—though he can hardly be called a labourer—that Eldred Sloam."

Mrs. Raven half raised herself. "Eldred Sloam has been long on the land, Leonard."

"Too long."

"Have you mentioned to anybody your intention to dismiss him ?" she resumed, eagerly seeking for a clue which might lead her to the source of her mysterious warning.

"No,—why do you ask ?" returned Leonard, getting surprised.

"Are you quite sure you have not mentioned it to anybody ?" she urged. "I want you to think before you answer me."

"I am quite sure I have not mentioned it to—stay," broke off Leonard—"I remember now. I did mention it to Mr. Toynbee on Saturday, when he was taking lunch here."

"Do you think he has mentioned it again ?"

"I think not—for certain. As he does not, I fancy, altogether approve of some of my contemplated changes, he would be little likely to talk of them. But why do you ask ?"

"Oh, for nothing," she answered, carelessly. "Leonard, I am going to crave a favour of you. Do not send Eldred Sloam away."

"Well, really, mother : this is too absurd," cried Leonard, not angrily, not even harshly, but much as he might have answered a

child who preferred a troublesome and unreasonable request. "You are getting some other strange fancy into your head in place of the one your London journey drove out of it."

"I don't often ask anything of you, Leonard," she wailed, "but let this man stay. Your father let him stay. You—you of course know who this man is said to be, Leonard: that he has Raven blood in his veins."

"Shall I give you my opinion, mother—that he never ought to have been tolerated on the estate at all. When shameful things happen they should be hidden away out of sight."

"You are right. But it was not done. Here the man has been, and here he is; and it will be cruel to uproot him. Ill character though he may be, he is to be pitied. He is not a Raven, of course; but ——"

"I should think not," scornfully spoke Leonard. "Not a Raven! You are not carrying your changeling theories back for a generation or two, I should hope, mother."

"Leonard," said his mother, with sudden dignity, "you blamed me for having allowed one fancy to grow to gigantic proportions in secrecy and silence. Do not, therefore, blame me for speaking now. Call this a fancy if you will, but the instinctive feeling against it lies too strongly within me to be flung aside. If you will not listen to my prayer, you must to my command—forgive me for presuming, Leonard. I desire that Eldred Sloam should remain where your father left him."

"Well, I won't speak to him to-morrow, at any rate," Leonard answered, with that sort of indulgent indifference with which nurses assent to the ravings of delirium. "Will that satisfy you? I can't promise more than that. He shall stay on for the present."

"And you will not dismiss him even later on, without giving me due warning?" she eagerly urged.

"Very well, mother, I will also promise that."

"Thank you, Leonard," she said, her tone trembling with emotion, "thank you very heartily. Even if you think you err, you will not regret erring for once on the side of mercy at your mother's request."

Leonard wished her good-night, and went away wondering. "It is indeed high time she got a companion," he mused. "I begin to think my father's death gave her a greater shock than I thought. Seems to me that her brain must be giving way!"

CHAPTER XIV.

MARY DAVIES'S ACCIDENT.

FRANK RAVEN dragged on his weary weeks in London. Philip Connell could not understand him at all. Philip's own plan of life was to work by night and trifle about through the day, earning by

various spasmodic sorts of literary labours, not enough to pay his way, but enough to maintain a certain credit, and so keep his debts steadily on the increase. That an end must come to such ways of life, Philip would have admitted, if pressed, but, as he said one day, "There's no need to look round the corner for trouble."

"No," Frank rejoined, "not if you take care to walk in the opposite direction."

"It is no use brooding," Philip would say, "and in your case it is folly to do it. There might be some excuse for me, if I did it. It would be a stiff pull on the governor if he had to pay my debts, as he would do if he knew of them; though I keep that dark, and my duns never dream of it. But you—you are a rich man, Frank. Not to say that the old lady ——"

"My mother," interrupted Frank.

"Not to say that your mother would certainly do the handsome thing for you at once, if you managed well," Philip went on, heedless of any rebuking spirit in Frank, "but you might help yourself by borrowing on the fortune which must be yours some day."

"At my mother's death," said Frank again, with a quivering lip.

"Well, everybody must die," observed Philip, with philosophy, "and our parents go before ourselves in the order of nature."

"Philip," said Frank, with simple earnestness, "I am not a rich man: I would rather not touch one farthing from home, if I can do without it. But I shall not borrow money on my expectations. I must get work of some sort, and that soon. I don't expect I'm up to much: but surely I can do a little and eke out my hundred pounds. And I can't go on living with you always; at least, not without sharing expenses."

Philip respected his distress, and not for worlds would he have hinted that Frank was benefitting, just now, not by money out of his own pocket, but by a steady increase of that wonderful mountain of debt which must certainly descend in an avalanche some day.

One morning further on, the letter for which Frank had vaguely watched lay before him. Its thick vellum envelope, deep black edge and heavy seal, made it conspicuous among the little light notes and blue missives addressed to his cousin.

Mrs. Raven had written what was, for her, quite a long letter. Two sheets of note-paper were covered by her large, flowing handwriting. And yet she seemed to have very little to say, and Frank scarcely knew whether he was gratified or disappointed.

"MY DEAR BOY,—I am longing to know when your London visit comes to an end. Ravenscourt has seemed very empty this harvest time with your dear father gone and you away. But I must not selfishly call you from pleasures and interests suitable to your age, and from the agreeable society of our kind nephew, Philip Connell. Only I shall be glad to see you when you care to come. My loneliness has been great, and I have resolved to engage a companion. I

advertised in some of the London papers, and have had many answers. One of them I fancied more than the rest, and have been in correspondence with the young lady. I think she will suit me : but as it is necessary that any permanent arrangement should be based upon a personal liking on both sides, I have invited her to pay me a trial visit. If we suit each other, her presence here will save you from any dutiful compunctions on the score of absence, and may make your home-comings more cheery. I am told she is a good musician. I don't think there is any other news from Raven, but of course I could not think of making such a change as this in the house without letting you know of it at once. My compliments to Philip, and I am, my dear boy,

“YOUR AFFECTIONATE MOTHER.”

“I think my mother likes me better while I am away than when I am present,” said Frank within himself, but he made no such reflection aloud. To Philip he only said that his mother was on the eve of engaging a young lady as companion.

“What a pity Mrs. Raven did not tell us this beforehand ; we might have recommended Evelyn Agate,” remarked Philip, as he opened his own letters. “I suppose she has done it in a hurry.”

“In a hurry, at last,” said Frank. “But I think she must have spoken about it for some time ; old Charity mentioned something of the sort to me before I left home.”

“Whew !” whistled Philip, scanning one of his notes. “What do you think this is, Frank ? A letter from Miss Agate, inviting us to go to her place this evening to say good-bye to Evelyn, who is off to Ravenscourt to pay a visit to its mistress, with a view to becoming her companion.”

“What an extraordinary thing !” exclaimed Frank. Philip nodded, and continued reading from Miss Agate’s letter : “From the coincidence of names and places, we cannot help thinking the lady must be either actually your friend’s mother, or else some connection of the family at present resident in his home. Ask him to come with you. It makes it easier for me to let Evelyn go. She is bearing the thought of this change in life very bravely.”

“You little humbug !” Philip apostrophized, alluding to Evelyn. “Does she humbug herself into that belief, or only think she humbugs you ?—Evelyn ‘bearing bravely,’—what has she to bear, dear imaginative Miss Agate ? Any day she would change you and your big brain and warm heart, for a diamond bracelet or a purse of money. And she has a better chance of picking up those where she’s going than where she is.”

Frank laughed.

“Ah,” commented Philip. “She will ask you some sly little questions to-night about your brother, Frank. Mark my words if she doesn’t. She asked me about *you* the other night, and I told her you were entirely dependent on your mother, and stopped short of

even saying 'while she lived.' For she's a long-sighted one, is Miss Evelyn, and you are rather green! Shall you like her for a sister-in-law?"

"Don't be silly, Philip."

"I should not care for her even for a cousin-in-law, I can tell you that. And I tell you now, Frank, that you may not cry out sour grapes upon me when she becomes Lady of Ravenscourt."

"Oh!" said Frank. "I thought you seemed to admire her very much: I overheard you paying her all sorts of compliments."

"Well," answered Philip, carelessly, "when you have to draw the bow in order to be civil at all, you may as well draw it pretty wide."

They started for Miss Agate's in the evening. It was the third time Frank had been there. The incongruousness of the surroundings which had so mystified him at first, had worn off. He knew now who and what he was going to see; and he looked at the crowded squalid streets, and the bare old houses, understanding how Gertrude Agate saw them and loved them and lived among them. This was not the sort of woman one finds in the conventional mansion with a back and front drawing-room and a butler's pantry. Special natures have their habitats, quite as distinctly as flowers.

There had been some preparation for their coming, for the parlour curtains—of some richly tinted stuff, though rather worn and faded—were drawn, and faintly illumined by a lamp burning within. The servant, Mary Davies, showed them into the presence of the two ladies. A pretty tea-service was already set, and though Miss Agate was her old self in her clinging black dress and plain frills, Evelyn had blossomed from her heavy velveteen into a creamy cashmere, set off with an olive green ribbon, which was also twined in her rich chestnut hair.

She left her hand in Frank's for a moment as he greeted her. "Is it not strange that I should be going to your people?" was all she said, and there was a sort of confiding appeal in her voice which might have touched the youth's sympathy but for his conviction that Philip, just behind him, was laughing in his sleeve.

"Yes, it is strange," interposed Gertrude, "and only proves what I always say, that the world is but a small place. And this seems to have happened so opportunely—as if it were purposed. The very same day that Evelyn was expecting her advertisement to appear, she took up the newspaper and saw one in it, a very nice one, from a lady wanting a companion, and she wrote at once. Now that I see you here, Mr. Raven, Evelyn's going to your mother makes me feel that she will be among friends."

"I have made up my mind to make friends wherever I go," cried Evelyn.

"Please to remember that Mrs. Raven is my aunt as well as Frank's mother," remarked Philip. "Does not that recommend her equally well? I believe nobody ever recollects that I am related to anybody but myself."

"Oh, to be sure—certainly," cried Evelyn. "Then how does the relationship come in? Mrs. Raven must be —"

"Mrs. Raven is the widow of my mother's brother," explained Philip.

"Mr. Connell," said Miss Agate, "you are quite right in saying that nobody—nobody, at least, as far as I am concerned—ever thinks of you in relation to your family."

"Oh, there are so many of us," answered Philip lightly. "We have to stretch out our affection to make it go round. There are four at home, three girls and one boy, and there are six away: two girls married, I in London, Jack in Demerara, Sidney in Halifax, and William somewhere on the high seas. We can't all write each other a weekly letter, and if one is honoured by it, the rest are jealous, so we are all impartially silent. I go home two or three times a year, and when I'm coming away I say to the mater, 'Remember, no news is good news: you'll hear directly anything goes wrong.' It would be awful for her to be always expecting six letters: she would never get through the stocking basket."

"That is the sensible way to look at matters," assented Evelyn, pouring out the tea. "Of what use are letters? When I was away at school I had often to give up a walk, or some such enjoyment, for the sake of the weekly letter that Gertrude insisted on. Don't you agree with me, Mr. Raven?"

"No, I don't," said Frank bluntly. "I wish I had somebody that I felt sure would care for a weekly letter from me."

"I am with you, Mr. Raven," said Miss Agate; "I am with you entirely."

"Well, I don't know," contended Evelyn. "I think a great deal of love is only a nuisance altogether. There is Mary Davies now, with *her* love—just because she nursed me! She has developed a new form of distress. Formerly she wept that I should go away at all. Now she weeps that I am going to Ravenstoke, and assures me the place is bad."

"What does she know about Ravenstoke?" asked Frank, rather piqued to hear any asperion cast on his beloved village.

"Of course she knows nothing," answered Evelyn: "wherever I had been going it would have been the same. She's an Alstock woman, and she says she has been in Ravenstoke (which is very likely—the places are not more than twelve miles apart, I believe), and that the Ravenstoke people are bad people. As she may possibly have found them, classing with the hedgers and ditchers."

"I think all the Raven people are fairly respectable," spoke Frank, inclined to stand up for the humblest peasant in the place. "There must be a few worthless characters, as there are everywhere, but they are so well looked after, that they don't do much harm. The most disreputable man in it is—but never mind," broke off Frank.

"Nay, let us hear the disreputable man's name?" cried Evelyn.

"Perhaps he may be one of Davies's old acquaintances. It will be fun to tell her we know the name of her respectable friend."

Frank felt as if he hated the smooth, bright girl, with her sweet, hard voice, and her heartless words.

"The man's name is Eldred Sloam," he said coldly. "He is in our employment, when he chooses to do any work, and lives on the estate. I should not wonder, though, if Leonard were to turn him off: he does not like him. Mr. Toynbee —"

"Who is Mr. Toynbee?" interrupted Evelyn.

"Mr. Toynbee is the vicar," Frank answered; and there he cut the conversation short by turning to Miss Agate, and beginning upon a very different subject.

Evelyn gave her head a slight toss; it did not escape the quick eye of Philip Connell, and he prepared to devote himself to her entertainment. Perhaps he liked her less than Frank did: certainly he could better have given reasons for his dislike. But he liked amusing himself, and he liked studying human nature. Philip Connell had once kept tame snakes in his chambers, and had written several magazine articles about them.

"Was Frank giving you an account of the beauties of Ravenstoke, and the virtues of its inhabitants?" he asked, dropping into the chair beside Evelyn, and speaking as if he had been deaf to their recent conversation.

"I put to him a question or two," returned Evelyn. "Of course, everything about Ravenstoke is interesting to me now. But I fear I wearied him, as he is gone in search of more improving conversation. Is your cousin very fond of improving his mind, Mr. Connell?"

"It is to be devoutly hoped so," answered Philip, with a glance intended to convey to Evelyn the unspoken words—"for he needs it." "Perhaps I can enlighten you upon some of the matters you would like to know, Miss Evelyn."

"How large is the family, then?" asked Evelyn in an undertone. "There is this one—I conclude—and Mrs. Raven, of course; and—an elder brother?"

Philip nodded. "An elder brother, of course; or Frank," glancing at him, "would not be the younger one."

"Is he at home? Does he live at the Court?"

"Certainly: it is Leonard's own house," said Philip. "He is the reigning squire."

"And there are no other children—no more younger brothers?" she went on.

"No; only Frank. You will find Ravenscourt a beautiful house, Miss Evelyn. And the estate is a good estate. And the genealogy is a long genealogy. Everything is as it should be."

"Ah! but what can that signify to the poor hired companion!" she sighed. "She should rest satisfied with the security of her salary and the comfort of her private apartment."

And while they carried on this skirmishing, Miss Agate and Frank were chatting seriously. He had touched and warmed her heart by inquiring after her unseen brother. Few of her visitors did so.

"How is Mr. Agate to-day?" Frank had said, in his shy, pleasant voice. And she looked up at him surprised, with grateful eyes.

"He is very well indeed—for him. I was able to give him a pleasure which he appreciated this morning. Look!" and she stretched out her hand for a small volume, daintily bound in white vellum, which lay on a side table. "This is a book which my brother brought out years ago. It is a collection of old Latin hymns translated by him into English verse. It was his labour of love while he was working as a tutor. And this is a new edition—fresh this week. You should have seen his face when I put it into his hand. And I am so proud of it, too! The hymns are very beautiful, and Theodore had real gifts as a translator, so the contents are worthy of the beautiful binding."

Frank held it in his hand, turning over the leaves, and carefully reading the title-page. It was the publisher's name and address which he wished to see.

"My mother wrote to me this morning," he said presently. "Telling me that she had invited a young lady to visit her. Little did she think I had the pleasure of knowing the household from which she comes. I should like to send a letter and a parcel to my mother by Miss Evelyn's hands. It would please her."

"Certainly. Evelyn will take it for you."

"What are you promising in my name?" interrupted Evelyn.

"Only that you will carry down a little packet from Mr. Frank to his mother," explained the elder lady.

"Oh, surely," cried Evelyn. "I start by the noonday train to-morrow. How shall I get the parcel? It is a long journey from Mr. Connell's chambers here. The railway station itself would be nearer, Mr. Frank." She was not at all unwilling that so presentable a young man should appear as her escort on the platform. Such meetings and partings are tender times, and leave more definite memories than a dozen ordinary social opportunities. Not that she was in the least attracted to Frank: nay, she was rather repelled. But Evelyn Agate was concerned in doing the best for Evelyn Agate, and Evelyn Agate's heart and feelings must give place to mercenary computations.

"I should think nothing of the walk here," said Frank, "only I shall have to make ready the parcel to-morrow. So I will meet you at the station, Miss Evelyn, without fail."

Mary Davies had entered the room with some preparation for the supper, which, in honour of Evelyn's "last night at home," and the invited presence of two guests, was to be rather less simple than usual. The small, pale, clean-looking woman, with the anxious look in her face, spread the table without once lifting her eyes to the two

gentlemen, and having done her duty would have retired in silence, but that Evelyn called her, just as she had her hand upon the door.

"Davies!" she said, in that musically metallic voice which Frank could not endure, "was one Eldred Sloam among your old friends at Ravenstoke? And was he a good man, or a bad one?"

The woman's short answer was inaudible. It was only one word, but whether it was "yes" or "no," or but some short exclamation, nobody could tell. She left the room hurriedly.

"Evelyn, you should not tease Mary. She —"

Miss Agate's reproof was cut off by the sound of a heavy fall outside. They ran to the rescue. Mary Davies had slipped her foot on the kitchen stairs, and was below in the corner. But when Philip picked her up, it was quite clear that no limbs were broken, or even sprained. She declared she was not hurt, not at all. Her face was very white, and her hands shook violently. "It was only 'shock,'" she said. She would just keep quiet for a bit, if the ladies would excuse her.

So they waited on themselves at supper, and there was little special conversation. Evelyn laughed at Miss Agate's hint that her ill-timed remark, being spoken before company, might have disconcerted Davies and caused her to lose her footing.

This especially amused Evelyn. "The very idea, Aunt Gertrude! As if people, servants especially, could be so easily put out!"

"Don't you love that sweet young woman dearly, cousin mine?" asked Philip, as he passed his arm through Frank's, for the walk homewards. "And what is the gift you are going to send to your mother, if I may ask?"

"I mean to get that beautiful new edition of Mr. Agate's translation of the Latin hymns," readily answered Frank. "I think my mother will be pleased with that." And in his own mind Frank added a few words.—"Such a gift will show her that I am neither hardened nor indifferent, though I do not go home. I never shall go, I think. It is hard to know there's no love for you anywhere in this wide world."

CHAPTER XV.

THE VICAR'S PUZZLE.

THE next morning was hot and sultry. Frank arrived at the station in very good time, and so had to wait alone in its closeness and dust. He almost thought that Evelyn meant to lose her train. But no, just at the last moment the little party appeared, Evelyn first, very fresh and trim, Miss Agate toiling behind, looking a little nervous, like a person who has been worried by keeping others up to a necessary mark. She was burdened by sundry hand-bags and

parasols, of which Frank hastened to relieve her. And last of all came Mary Davies, superintending a white wrapped portmanteau.

"I thought it would do us both a good turn if I brought Davies," Miss Agate said, shaking hands with Frank, "she will be the better for the ride in the cab, after her fall, and for the unaccustomed scene. And she was so pleased at the chance of seeing the last of Evelyn."

Davies was hanging on that young woman's movements with timid depreciation, anxiety in her eyes and regret in her face.

"Is it not delightful to find it one's duty to travel first-class?" said Evelyn to Frank, as she took her seat. "Ah, you know nothing of these feelings. These are pleasurable sensations reserved for poor people."

"I don't know," returned Frank, with blunt sincerity. "When we were at school, my father only allowed us third-class fares: he thought anything else ridiculous luxury for boys. In truth I don't think there's much difference. Nothing signifies to healthy people."

"Ah, that is because you do whichever you like, from choice and not from necessity," said Evelyn.

"Not altogether," interposed Gertrude. "It does not matter much to me, either: and I travel third-class from necessity. At least, almost from necessity. There is always so much else to be done with one's money, when one hasn't much."

"Well, some people have different instincts from others," said Evelyn. "And when those instincts have long lain ungratified, their gratification is a very conscious delight. It is part of my nature to love things sweet and soft and pleasant. It may be hereditary, you know," she laughed, "since I do not know who I am. At any rate, Mr. Frank, you must envy me my beautiful journey to your own dear home. I suppose I shall see you there soon?"

"Perhaps not," answered Frank, gravely. "I may not be at Raven for a long time."

"I shall not tell your mother that you say so," said Evelyn: "for I am sure you do not mean it."

And then the whistle sounded and the train was whirled away.

Miss Agate and Frank exchanged a few words and parted, Frank going his way, thinking much more of his parcel and of its destination than of its bearer. Gertrude and her attendant returned home, talking of Evelyn, timing the points of her progress, and trying to imagine what she would be feeling and doing. They never hit the truth. For she was soon sound asleep! She drank her little flask of wine and ate her biscuits almost before the train had crossed the last archway spanning London streets, and then composed herself for a nap. What were the villages she would pass through? Only dull places. What was the ancient forest she would cross? Only trees. Miss Agate would have admitted that her protégée was a little frivolous, perhaps a little unfeeling—nay, even a little selfish. But she never guessed that these dubious attributes, which she kindly set down to

the ebb and flow of a yet unsettled character, were really only the natural product of a shallow, hard, and low nature.

James Sloam and the pony-chaise awaited the young lady at the Raven station. Evelyn alighted in high spirits. She had often envied such a scene as that in which she now figured. The dark trees of the ancestral house in the background, the lingering inquisitive villagers, the neat little equipage; and her own dainty figure at the very front and centre of the stage. She was quite affable to James: yet the boy reported her later as "an awful fine lady." For which Mrs. Sims reproved him.

"The lad takes after his poor mother in more than her plain face," whispered she to Janet Mackay. "*She* was always taking brass for gold if it was done up ornamental."

Mrs. Raven came into the hall, and met the girl on the threshold. Beyond this action itself there was nothing warm in her reception. It was singularly quiet; as lacking in the chilly forms of civility as in the kindlier utterances of genuine hospitality.

Evelyn did not straightway give her Frank's packet then, though she had it in her reticule. Her acquaintance with the son of Ravenscourt was too striking a point to be thrust bluntly forward, and perhaps passed over in a hurry. She would go to her own room first; then, refreshed and trim, return to Mrs. Raven, bearing her son's gift in her hand.

Her quick glance satisfied herself in an instant that the room to which she was led was all that could be desired. The old-fashioned dormitories of Ravenscourt might not be very lofty, but they were large and bright, with white dimity hangings and fresh carpets, and bright chintzes. There were flowers on the toilet-table, flowers on the mantel-shelf, flowers everywhere.

"The mistress hopes very much that you will like your room. She was in here looking over it the moment before you came."

This speech called Evelyn's notice to the attendant who had followed her in. It was Charity Hale, and Evelyn liked neither her nor her address. The old woman's words were harmless enough, but they had no respectful prefix, and Evelyn detected something of familiarity in her tone, and of mockery in her small, peering eye. Evelyn thought she could not do better than at once teach her her place.

"Oh, I did not notice you before," she said, looking the old woman up and down. "I am glad you are here, for I am very tired. Draw off my boots, please."

"Aye, sure," said Charity. "Only I'm aat stiff, that if I kneel down, I don't know how I'm to get on my feet again."

"Oh, never mind, then," answered the baffled Evelyn.

"The younger women have all got their own work, ye see," commented Charity, quite serenely. "But the mistress will hire another to wait upon ye, likely—if you stay. It's no fit task for a poor old body like me."

Evelyn felt that there were insolent meanings in her words, and her face burned. "I shall be able to help myself," she said, with resolved quietness. "Thank you. You may go."

Charity withdrew without a word. And when Evelyn had finished her toilet, and ventured out of her room, feeling quite irresistible in a sea-green muslin robe, trimmed with white frills, she found herself rather at a loss which way to turn. For Ravenscourt was built on an old-fashioned plan, and was full of short corridors and corners and turns. However, after a few moments' bewildered wandering, she encountered a homely-looking, respectful female servant, who volunteered to lead her to the apartment where Mrs. Raven was likely to be.

Mrs. Raven was there, but she was not alone. Seated in an arm-chair, quite comfortably, was an elderly clergyman, whom Evelyn guessed rightly to be the Vicar. She was not sorry that her little story about Frank should have so eligible an auditor.

"I have something for you, madam," she said, addressing Mrs. Raven. "For I have had the pleasure of seeing young Mr. Raven in London. His cousin, Mr. Philip Connell, is a great friend of my adopted aunt, Miss Agate. Your son was good enough to entrust this to my keeping." And she handed the parcel to the widow, allowing her own hands to linger on it for a moment, after the mother's had taken it.

What a strange, quiet woman this Mrs. Raven was, was Evelyn's reflection. For she only looked up with a quick, significant glance at her, and said, "Oh! thank you," as if it was the most natural thing in the world that her son should be on speaking terms with her unknown, hired companion. It seemed to Evelyn almost as if the words did not reach the lady's mind for some time after they had entered her ear. For there was a long pause before she added: "I am glad Frank has seen you. Now he will not think of his home as haunted by a strange figure."

Mr. Toynbee had heard Evelyn's announcement with apparently much stronger interest. He had observed Evelyn intently from the moment she entered the room. Not because she was a pretty girl, though the good Vicar had a kindly eye for pretty girls, just as he had for his roses, or for any other fresh, sweet things. But it struck him that he had seen her somewhere before. When his eyes first rested on her, some old memory had started into sudden life and then sunk down, utterly dormant. Was it her face that he knew? Or the face of somebody like her? And under what circumstances had he previously seen her, or this resembling face? Odder still, two different associations seemed to mix, the one having an atmosphere of interest and pity: the other of dislike and repulsion.

"Ah! the world is very small, after all," said the Vicar, in his cheery tones. "If one went to the backwoods of the west, or the northern territory of Australia, one would find that one's next-door neighbour

was acquainted with one's mother's cousin, and knew all about one's uncle's bankruptcy."

Evelyn turned and looked at him with a faint smile, but said nothing. She thought of her own history, so unsuspected by him, and how, if it is impossible to lose oneself, she could prove it was quite possible to be lost. The reflection gave a touch of pathos to her face, and again the Vicar's gentler memory almost leaped into form, but again sank and eluded him.

Mrs. Raven had taken her son's gift from its paper wrappings. There it was, the dainty vellum-clad book, "Hymns Translated from the Latin, by Theodore Agate." She stood and looked at it—and a vision out of her past life, of hills and woodlands she had not seen for years, rose in her mind, and voices she would never hear again rang in her ears. She wondered why some women can faint and fall when the cold finger of despair touches their hearts, while others stand still, only the more erect and calm for his chill grasp. She wondered why those seem able to die when agony reaches its culminating point, while it only serves to stimulate the tide of vitality in these.

What did Frank know of that past?—*anything?*—or why had he sent her this book? Was everybody hunting her down—running swords into her heart to force her to cry out? Or was it all chance?—all done unconsciously? Was it only something in her own soul which gave significance to recent events? A weird story of her childhood came floating through her brain, wherein a man who had slain another, heard his shriek in the song of birds, saw his grave in every swelling turf, and his name in the veins of every leaf.

There had once been a spot of romance in the dull life of Mrs. Raven: a point from which she might have developed into a being very different from the dreary, conventional woman she was now. That early romance had come to nothing. It did not make it any easier to bear that there was nobody to blame but herself. She never had blamed herself; or thought herself worthy of blame. She had thrown the blame on the laws of society, on the conventional rulings of the world, which do not allow a well-born young lady, to throw herself away upon one deemed ineligible. Yet, half-unconsciously to herself, that blighted romance had remained her pleasantest memory; a sort of refuge for her starved and stunted heart.

Such were Mrs. Raven's thoughts and feelings through which the voices of Mr. Toynbee and Evelyn reached her, as a song in the street might reach a prisoner in a condemned cell. She heard the Vicar ask after Frank, and how he was looking, and whether he seemed enjoying his London visit. And then the Vicar rose to go, for it suddenly occurred to him that he might be one too many on the scene, when the new inmate had just arrived, and that Mrs. Raven's strange silence and indifference might be her method of hinting this to him.

However, he had scarcely passed out of the room, before Mrs. Raven stood, with her book in her hand, and spoke to Evelyn. "I feel singularly tired and faint this afternoon. You will not think me inhospitable if I retire to rest for a while? I am not often thus."

"Dear Mrs. Raven!" cried Evelyn, "I am here to relieve you from burdens—not to add another!" She had caught the trick of proud humility from many a better soul among her aunt's guests.

Something like a tear glistened in the widow's pale eyes. "You are a good girl," she said. "You will find books—and please call the servants to show you anything or tell you anything you wish."

And as she passed out of the room, she paused before Evelyn and laid her cold thin fingers over the girl's warm hand, and folded them so for a moment.

"I'm afraid it won't be lively here," reflected Evelyn. "I don't wonder Mr. Frank made his escape. But it is easier to bear with tears and sentimentalities for a good salary than out of mere family affection! I'll try to put up with it—until I've saved some money, at any rate."

The good Vicar was half sorry to have curtailed his visit. Evelyn's face had so "bothered" him, that he would fain have watched it longer, to see whether any fresh or varying expression might aid him in the will-o'-the-wisp memories which started from the past only to elude his grasp.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE STRANGER IN THE TRAIN.

"I THINK I'm getting home-sick," Philip Connell announced to Frank, one morning. "What do you say if we both take a run down to Colburn, and see my old folks and the girls?"

Frank looked up from his coffee, but said nothing.

"Next week will be Michaelmas," continued Philip. "It looks well to go out of town at the regulation holiday times. Seems to people as if one was in the swim, though the fact is that I'm generally busier in holiday times than at any other season."

"How does that come about?" asked Frank, listlessly.

"Why, don't you see? When the real successful workers are glad to turn their backs, that's the very time when a poor devil like me gets a chance. I did get a brief once, Frank; though you may not believe it. It came in on the Saturday after Good Friday, sent in by a miserly old solicitor who went to his office 'for his letters' every day out of the three hundred and sixty-five."

"Hope you got a smart fee with it!"

"Fair enough. They will be awfully glad to see you at home, old boy," added Philip, with a change of tone. "We never invited you to Colburn, Frank; my people and yours were estranged, you see;

but my mother will rejoice over you: a nephew's place in her heart is still unsupplied. And the governor is a jolly old boy: most ministers are when you know them. You needn't be afraid of him."

"I was never afraid of Mr. Toynbee," said Frank, tartly. "He was always one of my best friends. I should like to see Toynbee again! I hope he doesn't think ill of me."

"Do well for yourself, and then he won't. That's scriptural, Frank."

"I don't feel as if I ought to be paying visits and taking holidays when I've got no home and no work, and no place for myself in all the wide world," said Frank, rather drearily.

"Now don't get into the blues," returned Philip. "It's just the time for a fellow to pay visits, when he can't invite in return; and nobody can say you're neglecting your business when you have none to do."

Frank's face darkened.

"Of course, I'm only chaffing you," Philip added hastily, seeing the cloud. "Next to Ravenscourt, is not our house your home? And what is nearer your duty than a little attention to an aunt—your father's own sister, who would never have been alienated from him but for an influence whose wisdom and kindness you yourself have some cause to doubt?"

Frank did not speak. He knew the allusion was intended for his mother.

"My father is a practical man, too," Philip went on. "He might give you a hint worth getting. He and the mother must have had a hard enough struggle in their own day; and when people once get their eyes well opened they generally keep them so. You can't do better than come with me, Frank. I really want to go; and I wouldn't leave you moping here by yourself."

Frank tacitly yielded. "It's a wonder you are home-sick," he said to Philip. "When you said you did not write to your mother, did you tell an untruth?"

Philip laughed. "Oh dear, no. In our family my father is the general correspondent. I write to him regularly. But one sometimes has to have a little spar with him about money matters and the like, that one doesn't want the mother to go crying over, or talking about to the girls. Any more coffee?"

"No, thank you."

"The governor hinted to me that she got uneasy if he did not show her my letters, and took to fancying I had the croup or something. So I told her I'd always write to her very self if anything of that sort was wrong. Of course, I shouldn't, you know—not if it was anything serious. But when I get a cold or a headache, I write and tell her so, to maintain the delusion and keep her heart at rest."

"I'm glad I don't care much for you," said Frank, with sudden and hearty emphasis.

"Oh come, I say, old boy, but I flattered myself that you did," cried Philip. "And so you do, only you don't know it. That's how it always is," he added, with a comical affectation of sentimentality. "One never can get at the truth—let one try as one may!"

"I know you've been very kind to me. I shouldn't have said what I did. You are the only friend I have," said Frank, dismally.

"The more's the pity," rejoined Philip, with unabated geniality, "and it's all your own fault. But we'll go home to Colburn and have a jolly time, and you'll get rattled up."

In reality, a very kindly little plot had elaborated itself in Philip Connell's mind. He was sincerely troubled about Frank. All the young fellow's sensitiveness seemed mere morbidness to him. As he put it to himself, he would have bantered the "old lady" into a good temper and defied Leonard. Of course, each side of life had its advantages and its drawbacks, home and Bohemian. One did not get such delicious coffee and rolls at one's chamber breakfasts as one got at home; but then at home one got no oyster suppers. Dainty was the home drapery, and cosey the home blankets; but there one must not smoke at all hours and in all places. So the law of compensation, illustrated by these little things, held throughout.

But there seemed no law of compensation for poor Frank. He did not seem to care for the pleasures which remained for his taking. He was civil enough to Philip's London friends, but, with the exception of Gertrude Agate, he remained a mere outsider. He had dropped his cigars too, whether with an eye to thrift or to self-mortification, Philip could not determine. Anyway, Philip began to be rather concerned for him.

"This is the sort of fellow who kills himself sometimes, or goes mad, or runs to the dogs outright," mused the young barrister. "He can't make believe to be happy when he isn't, as most of us do. He takes his misery unmixed, and that sometimes leads, all of a sudden, to doing ditto with brandy. I will not be solely responsible for him any longer. I'll shuffle him off upon the governor. Besides, the sight of our place, and the mother and the girls, will be a very present picture of the charms he is resigning, and then he won't resign 'em. That's the way to tempt your martyrs out of martyrdom."

There was real kindness beneath Philip's surface of heartless cynicism, but it was not the kindness on which a sore heart rests for healing. And if poor Frank had felt desolate at his lonely departure from Ravenstoke, he felt doubly desolate when, in Philip's company, he started from London for Colburn. Before he did so, there was plenty of time to write to the Court and tell his mother of his intention. He would not seem surreptitiously to change the family habits.

Colburn was situated in the northern part of the Midlands, and a great part of the journey towards it was sufficiently depressing. After the gentle, daintily-kept slopes and woodlands to the immediate north of London were rapidly passed, there remained little to gaze at, save

a succession of flat and dreary fields, till they arrived at the junction where they changed trains. Nor did this improve the prospect, since it only involved divergence from the main and comparatively open route into the crowd of dirty, commonplace, commercial towns, and dark-looking strongholds of mining districts. And as Frank looked down on the rows upon rows of colliers' huts, with the coarse women lounging at their doors, and the unkempt children rising up from their mud-pies and puddles to shout at the passing train, it seemed as if the world had changed as much as himself. For Frank's past experience lay chiefly with sylvan scenery and its smiling woods and dales. It was at this railway junction that they first exchanged words with the only passenger who had accompanied them from London.

This British silence had not been due to any reserve on Philip's part. He had made several general remarks, and had got no answer from either Frank or the stranger. This stranger was a slight young man, whose small, delicately-cut features and closely-shaven chin allowed his age to be anywhere between twenty and five-and-twenty years. The darkness of his hair and eyes, together with a vague something in his whole bearing, suggested foreign extraction.

"Perhaps he doesn't understand what I say," was Philip's good-humoured mental explanation of this taciturnity, "but I'll speak very slowly next time." But here they at length reached the junction.

As the train slackened speed, the stranger himself spoke. In a low, musical voice, and in the best of English, though with a slightly foreign accent, he addressed Philip.

"Do we wait for the other train on the platform where we alight, or do we require to cross the lines?"

"It depends upon what train one may want," answered Philip, readily. "You wait here for the local train to Dingford and Rissit; you cross one bridge for Colburn, two for —"

"Thank you," answered the young man. "I am going to Colburn."

"So are we," said Philip, sociably. "If you follow us, you can't go wrong."

"Ah, you know it, then!"

"Know it! I was born at Colburn. I have been passing to and fro all my life. Pleasant little place, Colburn—to those who know it well, though it may not impress a stranger very favourably."

There was no time for more in the haste of changing trains.

"Have you ever been at Colburn before?" resumed Philip, when they were again seated.

"Never," answered the stranger.

"If I can be of any service to you, I shall be glad," Philip went on. "I think the Stag Hotel might suit you. The Royal is no better, though it is ever so much dearer, and strangers get 'taken in' here in two or three ways."

"Very many thanks," said the young man, again. "I should have been very much indebted to you under some circumstances, but an acquaintance has already taken apartments for me."

"Oh, you know some Colburn people?" cried Philip. "That's nice. I daresay we shall come across you again: my folks know everybody. You may have heard the name. Every Colburnite, of whatever sect, has had some sort of contact with the Reverend James Connell: and he is my father."

The foreigner's pale, sensitive face flushed; and there came a curious flash as of awakening in the dark dreamy eyes. "My friends in Colburn are—is—one of Mr. Connell's younger sons," he said: "Percy Connell."

"My brother Percy!" responded Philip heartily, holding out his hand. "I'm Philip, the barrister in London, you know: you'll have heard of me. Running down, you see, to be a boy at home for a few days."

"I have heard of Mr. Philip," said the foreigner, taking the proffered hand, and speaking with that inflection of voice and uplifting of the eye which conveys the most delicate of compliments. "But I cannot expect he has ever heard of me. I had the felicity to make friends with your family last year, when they were taking their holiday by the sea at Sandgate. They—Mr. Percy—have kindly kept up a correspondence with me since. My name is Marco Learli."

Nobody notices when a foreigner's nouns, pronouns and verbs do not perfectly agree.

"I have heard of you, then," said Philip; "and have a distinct idea that you were a great item in the enjoyment of that Sandgate holiday. I am glad you should be down when I am."

And he rather wondered within himself why the household hospitality had not been extended to this acquaintance. For besides that the Connells had a spare bed-room, which had grown absolutely shabby with constant use, the young people could, in their own phraseology, "condense" themselves to any extent. But the stranger's next speech explained this.

"Mrs. Connell invited me to stay in her house," he said, in that soft, musical voice. "And I should have been most delighted to do so, but I contemplate a long visit and it will be necessary for me to pursue my usual avocation—that of artist. Yet I hope to see very much of my kind friends, the thought of whom makes Colburn feel like home to the poor exile who has not even a country of his own."

Philip was accustomed to meet Italians at Miss Agate's house, and he quite understood their pathetic allusions to their land—in those days lying dismembered among alien tyrannies. But this young fellow was so handsome, and so sad, and so sweet-voiced, that Philip thought within himself it was more than likely the mother must have opened a very warm corner of her heart to him.

"This is Detting," observed Philip presently, as the train stopped at a dirty little platform, and the stranger and Frank both looked out. "Here they collect the tickets for Colburn," continued Philip, getting his own ready. "And here"—and he made a dive at a small newspaper boy, shouting on the platform—"here is the dear old *Colburn News*; with all its advertisements of desirable and elegant villas close to the railway station, and of eligible and promising servants with three months' bad character from their last place. Let us see what's going on. We generally have some sort of entertainment on the wing—negro minstrels, or a fat pig, or something else, to enliven the natives."

Philip ran his eyes over the paper, turning it from side to side. Suddenly an amused expression, blended with surprise, lighted up his face.

"Ha! here's fun! We shall have some sport with this, Frank. Listen.

"Arrived in Colburn: the Great Oriental Mystery, and lineal successor of the Delphic Oracle, Madame Allebasi Elah! Who can look into the Past, see into the Future, and answer questions concerning things you wish to know. In your own interest, lose no time in consulting her. Interviews granted, 5s.—Private houses visited, 10s. 6d. At home between 12 and 4, at Daylight Villa, Colburn. All letters promptly attended to."

"What a spree we'll have with her!" was Philip's delighted comment, as he looked up from the paper. "She'll tell our fortunes for us, Frank—and no doubt promise me the Lord-Chancellorship."

"I wish she could tell mine—really," answered Frank.

"We will go to her, old boy. 'Twill be a break in the proprieties of home, if nothing else. Mind, though, we shall have to keep it dark from the governor. And now here we are," broke off Philip, as the train steamed into the station: "and here are Percy and Louisa—brought forth by my telegram. Did they expect you also by this train?" he asked, turning to Learli.

"I think so," said the young man in a faint voice. He looked paler than ever now, perhaps in contrast to the vivid bloom of Louisa Connell, who greeted him almost before the train had stopped. She was a tall, handsome girl, with a slight Raven look about her, inherited from her mother. Even dispirited Frank felt that it would be pleasant if she seemed glad to see him—as glad as she was to see young Learli, for instance. Percy Connell was but a new edition of Philip, and was instantly on the easiest terms with the cousin he had never in his life seen before. Both the sister and the brother pressed their invitations on the Italian.

"It's a downright sell that you are not coming home with us altogether," said Percy.

"Can't you be induced to come even yet?" pleaded Louisa. "Are not Philip and—our cousin—extra attractions?"

"I need no extra attractions, you know," said the young man, with a strange, ghastly smile. "Do not press on me these liberal invitations, or you may have too much of me."

Perhaps, during the running to and fro after the luggage, he and the young lady found time for the interchange of a few private observations. But what could lie in these hurried remarks to account for the gravity and pain which had settled on Louisa's blooming face, as they parted from him, and entered the Connell chaise? Philip took the reins, and Frank was made to take the seat of honour beside him, Louisa and Percy sitting behind.

"Learli's looking bad, Louie," said that outspoken youth, who was own brother to Philip in the way of using his tongue everlastingly. "It gave me quite a start to see him. We shall have to feed him up, or he'll be going off in a decline."

Louisa answered nothing. Her face was turned from him.

"The cousin looks a handsome fellow," continued Percy, in a lowered voice. "Do you think the lady-aunt down at the Court might make it up with all of us if one of you girls married back into the Raven family?"

Miss Connell made one of those "down-setting" remarks in reply which elder sisters know how to administer, but with an added tartness of tone which gave her brother distinctly to understand that he was treading on delicate ground somehow, and had better be silent. As it was quite impossible for him to keep quiet, he bent forward and devoted himself to his seniors in front.

"Look at those placards," he said, pointing to some flaming posters on the wall they were then passing; and which Philip and Frank saw to be further announcements of "the Oriental Mystery."

"Well, who is she? and what is the fun?" asked Philip.

"Goodness knows who she is," said the young fellow. "She only came into Colburn yesterday, and I've been to see her already. Such a lark? I'll tell you all about it when I get a chance; you'll have to go to her yourself, Philip.—Here we are at home."

Philip drew up gladly. "And here are the young tomboys!" he cried, leaping down, as two little girls of ten and twelve rushed wildly out of the garden gate. "As saucy and sturdy as ever," he added, kissing them heartily.

"And that is the new governess," said Percy, as a small, sweet-looking young woman in deep mourning came forward, watchful over her charges. "Miss Alice Cleare," announced he to Frank: "and she's one of the right sort," he added in a whisper.

And Frank Raven, in the days to come, often remembered that rough-and-ready introduction.

(*To be continued.*)

MR. LANDON.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "MRS. JERNINGHAM'S JOURNAL."

I.

THE whole family were assembled in the windows of the sitting-room, to watch for Mabel's return home. If the visit to her aunt's had been an event, what was the coming back from it? It was only six weeks ago since Fanny and Ursula had helped to make the muslin dresses, and sew the lace on the pretty black silk mantle, which, to their unsophisticated eyes, seemed wonderful finery. Only six weeks since the schoolboy Herbert had flung one of nurse's old shoes after the retreating carriage that bore away the eldest born, the universal favourite, friend, and darling, on her first visit from home. What an age they had imagined those six weeks, beforehand. How short a time they had seemed in passing—and now they were over, actually over, and Mabel was coming home. The expectation was joy, its fulfilment rapture. The slim, fair, smiling girl was amongst them once more, with an avalanche of brothers and sisters overwhelming her, the happy mother, having had the first kiss, serenely resigning her to their embraces.

What a delightful party crowded round the tea-table, by-and-by. What questions, what answers, what talking of a dozen tongues at once, what bursts of laughter, what innocent joy! While one and all devoured the pretty creature with their eyes, and kept declaring that she was their own old Mabel, just the same as when she had left them.

Only the mother looked into the blue eyes of her darling, and in their transparent depths saw something that sent a thrill through her matronly heart, with the certainty that she was *not* the same, and would never through all her life be "just the same" again.

The first moment they were alone together—and that was not till the tired little maiden had been conducted into her bed-room by her adoring sisters, and at last left to go to her bed—the anxious mother, full of hopes and fears, had glided into it. In that first moment, then, she slid her arms round her daughter, and whispered, "Have you anything to tell me?"

The sweet face, all one blush, was hidden on her shoulder.

"Oh yes, mamma—yes."

Then the mother felt that her darling was hers no longer, and that a new life—full, she trusted, of a higher and deeper happiness than the innocent past—was prepared for her child. Oh, that it might be covered with roses and sunshine; that true love might illumine it. But all she said to her child was, with tender caresses, "Who is it?"

"Mr. Landon, mamma," whispered Mabel softly, as a shy, happy fairy might breathe the name of her lover.

The clergyman's wife stood as one stunned. She had fallen back from her daughter, and gazed at her with wide-opened, unbelieving eyes.

"Mr. Landon!" she cried. "That charming man whom everyone was in love with?"

Mabel laughed; raised her blushing face, and threw back her sunny curls with the old saucy movement her mother knew so well.

"Yes," she said. "But then you see, mamma, *he* liked only—*me*."

"That rich man!" said Mrs. Middleton; and it is to her credit that *that* was only her second thought and that she hastily added, "And so clever and delightful in every way—at least, so your aunt said, Mabel."

"Indeed he is," replied the girl, at once earnestly and bashfully. "He is everything that is amiable and charming and good—nobody seemed able to admire or like him enough. And he is richer than anybody we ever heard of, mamma, except papa's old pupil, Lord Eversham."

"It is a very short acquaintance, my Mabel."

"Yes, it is," gravely and thoughtfully; "but that does not always signify, does it, mamma? You may be years knowing some people, and some you know in a minute."

"And did he pay you a great deal of attention, Mabel?"

"I don't really know, mamma. It never occurred to me that he cared for me until yesterday. I happened to be alone in the conservatory, and he happened to come in—and then—then—then—he told me he loved me. And so it was all settled, and Aunt Letty was delighted, and said you and papa ought to jump for joy."

"I'm sure, my darling, we are as glad and thankful as possible—at least I am, and so will papa be when he hears about it. And where is his home, dearest? Where will my Mabel have to live?"

"I don't know one bit, mamma; I never thought about that. But here's a letter to papa from Aunt Letty; perhaps that will tell more about him, and he is coming here himself to-morrow."

"To-morrow! Oh my goodness, Mabel! and there's nothing in the house fit for his dinner. It is *such* a time of year: lamb is still so dear, and as for chickens—well now, really I don't know what we can have."

"Oh, never mind, mamma, I don't think he cares a bit what he eats. He has been a great deal abroad, you know, in Russia and Siberia, and those sort of places, where people can't afford to be particular; and he is not coming to stay in the house—Aunt Letty settled all *that* with him. He will take a bed at the Crown, and just be in and out—and I know you'll like him directly, and that you won't mind him, he is so amiable and bright."

"And are his parents living? Has he any brothers and sisters?"

"Ah, well! how *very* odd, mamma. I don't believe we any of us ever thought of *that* for a minute. We were all of us only thinking of *him*, and I haven't a notion if he has any relations, or anything about them. Dear me, I hope they will like me, if he has! How curious it will seem to have fresh brothers and sisters!"

"Well, my love, I think I shall take your aunt's letter to your papa; perhaps that will tell us more about him than you can. At any rate, to-morrow will answer all questions that we shall care to ask."

So leaving her pretty Mabel to dream of that blissful to-morrow, Mrs. Middleton hastened to her husband's dressing-room, her heart beating fast with joy, pride, and thankfulness.

This was the letter, which, after a few words of eager explanation, she read over his shoulder:

"MY DEAR BROTHER,—I do think I have made a very pretty job of my first attempt at chaperoning a niece, and I only hope I may be able to do half as well for my own daughters, poor poppets, when they are old enough, as I have for yours. I congratulate you on the prospect of a son-in-law with ten thousand a-year, and who is one of the most charming men in Europe. Only think of our little Mabel proving more attractive than all the smart, accomplished girls he met here! and only think of a week having done it all, and decided the child's fate for life! He only arrived on Tuesday night—you know Sir George had written to me about him from St. Petersburg, and could not praise him enough, and Sir George is such a straight-laced old gentleman, that one is sure a young man must be almost too proper of whom he writes with enthusiasm. And he told me that he had ten thousand a-year, and was coming to England to buy a place. So we made great fun about it beforehand, and all the girls were ready to set their caps at him, and then when he came he was so charming that they all began to fall really in love with him. As to Lady Macgregor, as I told your wife in my last letter, she got in one of her desperate ways, and was always calling him off from anyone else, to make him do something or other for one of her three. However, it was of no use; marriages are made in Heaven, and Heaven had decided that our Mabel was to be Mrs. Landon. The dear child's amazement was the most amusing thing, and I do believe she thought of all of you more than of herself. However, he has talked her into a very pretty amount of bashful preference, and as she considers him the best and most superior of created beings, another week's courtship will find her desperately in love. She is a darling, and of course I will come to her wedding. Mr. Landon will make magnificent settlements, and knows she is not to have a penny.

"Your affectionate Sister,

"LETITIA."

The father and mother looked at each other, and said, "Ten thousand a-year!"

"And such a good man," added she.

"Sir George's praise is enough to make one easy and thankful," said he.

"She seems so happy," said Mrs. Middleton.

"And I thought she was a child still," sighed he. "Why, how old is she, mamma?"

"Well, she was eighteen last birthday, and she is a clever girl, with excellent sense. I was only nineteen when you thought me old enough to be a wife, my dear."

"Yes, but then you were not my own child whom I had known as a baby only the day before; you flashed on me all at once as an adorable young lady."

"And that is how our Mabel has flashed on Mr. Landon. But oh! my dear Jack, he is coming here to-morrow!"

"Of course he is," said the Reverend Jack, thoughtless of the state of the larder, or the price of lamb; "and quite right too."

"But it is so difficult to receive a guest like that, in our little way. Why, even the dinners —"

Now Mrs. Middleton was a very sensible woman, but, being a woman, she could not help (and she was quite right) troubling herself about these things. But when her husband said their part was simply to do the best they could, and not pretend to be better than they were, she sincerely agreed with him.

"Only," she added, "one does like—and there's no pretence in *that*—to be seen at one's best and not at one's worst. Do you remember the only time Lady Eversham ever called here, was the only time the white hen ever walked into the drawing-room! That was not being seen at one's best, certainly."

And she laughed at the recollection, while her husband patted her cheek as fondly as he had some twenty years before, when he had consoled the distressed young housekeeper for the white hen's entrée.

II.

HE came, saw, and conquered. Everybody was delighted with him—except Mr. Harvey. And who was he? He was the curate, a sensible man of about thirty, of good family and good expectations, who was only acting as curate until an excellent family living fell vacant, and who thought Mabel Middleton the sweetest, dearest, prettiest, and best little angel that any man, be he who he may, need ever wish to have as a wife.

Mr. Harvey did not like him.

Mr. Landon was tall and good-looking, with a bright pleasant face, almost boyish in its expression of fresh good humour; agreeable manners; sound and sensible in conversation, quite the gentleman, and devoted to Mabel. And yet Mr. Harvey did not like him.

Why? Was it jealousy? No—he told himself that it was *not*

jealousy, but that there was something about Mr. Landon which created a feeling of distrust.

Everybody else trusted him, liked him, admired him, went into a state of enthusiasm about him, and finally, before he had been a day in the house, adored him.

Mr. Harvey was in a minority of one.

The interview with Mr. Middleton was most satisfactory, and he ate his dinner as if he enjoyed it, declared the potatoes were the best he had ever tasted, and that sirloin of beef was delicious after Russian fare. So Mrs. Middleton had nothing to disturb the happiness with which she looked from her guest to her daughter, and thought of the delightful life which she believed lay stretched before them.

In the evening Mabel and her lover were left alone in the drawing-room. Mr. Landon had a very charming way of making love, and Mabel found that it was a very agreeable thing indeed to be made love to. After a great many delicious nothings had been uttered, he began to form plans after the fashion of lovers.

"I think we must be married very soon," he began, "and then I will take you abroad."

Mabel only blushed at the first paragraph of his speech, but she smiled at the second, and said softly, "I do wish to see Switzerland."

"Switzerland!" said he, with marked contempt. "Oh, that's just like stepping out into one's own front garden. Yes, to be sure, you shall go to Switzerland, and Italy, and those little places, if you like; but I thought of South America and Africa. There are charming localities in both, that have been very little tampered with." And he gave her one of his bright, sweet, almost boyish smiles, that made her feel life must be delightful with him anywhere. "And then," he continued, "we shall come back after we have explored the world, and find a home; a home in either England or Scotland. Which shall it be? Have you any especial fancy? I think the Highlands might do."

"Oh yes! it will be exquisite to live in the Highlands. But I have always had such a notion of Devonshire."

"Well, why not both? A castle in the Highlands, and a park in the sweet southern county, summer and winter residences; and then a house in London, of course; and then frequent trips abroad. Would that be a pleasant life, my Mabel?"

"Yes," said she, laughing; "if life is long enough to live in so many places."

"When we get old, we will fix in whichever we like best. Think of growing old together! Only I can't fancy that sweet face ever growing old."

"And then to have all of them come and stay with us!"

"Yes. How those fine boys and pretty girls will enjoy it, and

the dear father and mother ; and then we must give parties—stately dinner parties and brilliant balls—and then, when we have had our fill of gaiety, fly off to Africa for a bit."

As they talked, Mabel had moved forward to a little table to arrange some flowers in a vase that stood upon it, and her delicate fingers were busy with lilies and roses. A slight pause made her glance round at her lover, who, to her amazement, she found was making the most horrible grimaces, and pointing at her with his finger in a manner which, for the moment, struck her as quite shocking. She uttered an exclamation, but he changed his position and composed his countenance so rapidly that, with a bewildered sensation, she almost fancied her eyes had deceived her ; and, as he immediately resumed the conversation, she felt too timid to say anything about what she had seen.

Half an hour more of the delightful talk common to lovers put everything else out of her head, and the rest of the evening was spent most agreeably with the family, who assembled at the usual hour for tea. The next day everything was *couleur-de-rose*, and Mabel, in her new happiness, wondered how it was that anybody ever had care or trouble.

"What a beautiful world it is," said she to Mr. Landon, as they were strolling together in the little wood near the Rectory.

"Beautiful? yes," he cried ; "it is beautiful. It is a world of pleasures, and every pleasure brings duties along with it, which make it doubly dear. The ties that are to bind us, my darling, will give us new duties that we never had before, and if we buy a house we shall have duties to perform to the poor people, and to our dependants and servants."

"That is a charming way of putting it," said Mabel, looking up to him with tender reverence. "How good you are! you must tell me of all my duties, and show me what I ought to do."

"We will tell and show each other," replied he, "setting out with the one principle, that every fresh step we take brings fresh duties along with it, and that they are all the consequences of our happiness, and therefore to be considered as part of it, and valued accordingly."

"You are so rich," said Mabel, "and riches carry such responsibilities with them. Now I have never been rich, you know, so all the duties I have known anything about are those belonging to—well, not actual poverty—but to having to do all sorts of things, and be as useful as one can."

"I shall like making you rich," he cried, smiling. "It is much nicer than if you had always been well off; everything will seem so pleasant to you."

She gave him a grateful look and smile. "What have I done to be so happy?" she said softly.

And so they passed on into the woods. Into the woods, where their feet trod on the delicious moss carpet, while flowers blossomed

around them, and birds sang above their heads. An intricate network of green leaves broke the sky up into little pieces of sparkling blue light, each one of which brought to Mabel's heart a promise of some fresh happiness. The path became narrower, and Mr. Landon fell behind her, while a soft sweet silence took the place of their former animated conversation. Suddenly she turned round to speak to him, and there he was pointing at her with his forefinger, and making the same horrible grimaces that had startled her the day before. Every feature of his face seemed altered, his complexion looked grey, while the very colour and shape of his eyes appeared changed by the demoniacal contortions. There was something so shocking in seeing such a creature as this standing behind her and pointing at her in this cool and beautiful wood, and with all the thoughts and feelings in her mind called up by their previous conversation, that Mabel could not bear it and screamed aloud. Mr. Landon turned quickly aside, and, stretching his arm up into a tree, brought down a lovely branch of honeysuckle. When he turned towards her again he had his own face, and he presented the flowers to her with his own peculiar bright, sweet smile; but she thought she saw that his lip was quivering, and that drops of perspiration stood on his forehead.

"Mr. Landon," she said, timidly, really not knowing how to proceed.

"What is it, my dearest?" was the reply.

"Why did you—why do you—" and she hesitated and stopped again, from the extreme difficulty of putting the fact into words, and of asking her lover why he made horrible faces, and pointed at her whenever her back was turned.

"I did nothing, dearest," he answered in a tone of tender reproof.
"Don't be fanciful, my Mabel."

Fanciful! Was she fanciful? Could she twice have *fancied* such a thing as that? But how could she tell him? What could she say? Silenced but not convinced, and decidedly frightened, she led the way into a walk by which they would soon reach home. But Mr. Landon was at her side again as quickly as possible, and his delightful conversation had almost effaced the impression made by his strange behaviour before they had arrived at the Rectory gate.

Her spirits, however, did not quite recover themselves, and she was pale and thoughtful when, after the usual evening toilettes had been performed, the party assembled for tea.

After this, two or three days passed away pleasantly enough, and Mabel began to recover herself, and to feel more at her ease. Mr. Landon was making all the world fond of him; he was so bright and cheerful, so conformable—no slight merit in a new member of a large family party—fell into all their ways so naturally; while his conversation, his opinions, and his evident standard, were all higher and better than those of nine young men out of ten. He was also desperately in-

love with his pretty, shy Mabel, as everybody might see. Mr. and Mrs. Middleton were delighted with him ; the girls and children adored him.

And Mabel ? Mabel was happy. Sometimes she forgot those strange occurrences ; sometimes she almost persuaded herself they had only existed in her own fancy, and had not really happened. Mrs. Middleton watched her a little anxiously for a time, and then felt satisfied that all was right. Mr. Landon was eager that the wedding-day should be fixed, and, as there really was no reason for delay, September was spoken of, and then August, after the custom of those who have to fix wedding-days. It was now near the end of June.

III.

MABEL happened to come down stairs a little earlier than usual one morning, and, passing the door of her father's study, heard an odd noise inside. The door stood half open, and she peeped in. She saw a sight which I daresay she never forgot as long as she lived. Mr. Landon was there by himself, and was, in a quiet, solemn manner, dancing about the room, and making the same shocking contortions of countenance that had so frightened her on two former occasions. She gave a little scream, and, without pausing for a second, turned round and rushed upstairs into her mother's room, which she entered breathless and panting.

Mrs. Middleton, who was occupied in putting the finishing touches to her simple morning toilet, was very much astonished by her daughter's appearance.

"I cannot bear it, mamma ! I cannot bear it !" Mabel cried, in great agitation.

"What is it, my love ? what has happened ?"

"Mr. Landon, mamma. Oh, what shall I do ?" and she wrung her hands helplessly.

"My dear, you have not quarrelled, surely ! Oh, I hope not !"

"Quarrelled ? No, no, mamma ; but it is so dreadful, so odd ! He— But I can't tell you. Come and see yourself."

Mrs. Middleton silently followed her daughter down stairs, who led her straight into the study, where they found Mr. Landon sitting in the easy-chair reading the newspaper. He got up, smiling and cheerful as ever.

"So," he said, "you have discovered me ? What will the Rector say ? I actually strolled in here to read yesterday's newspaper ; for when this young lady is with me I find politics impossible. Oh, Mabel, you have a great deal to answer for !"

"What is it, Mr. Landon ?" said the mother anxiously.

He looked surprised. "The *Times*," he replied, after a minute, holding the paper out to her. "I was reading the foreign news."

"Why did you bring me here, Mabel ?" asked Mrs. Middleton.

Mabel stood, pale and shamefaced, beside her.

"Oh, mamma, come away!" she said.

"Dear Mabel," said Mr. Landon, kindly and anxiously, "what is the matter? Are you not well?"

"No, I am not well," answered Mabel, without knowing what she said. "But you, Mr. Landon—did you—didn't you—?" She stopped abruptly, colouring violently, and not knowing how to put her question into words. She felt that she *could* not ask him why he had been dancing so solemnly by himself in her father's study, and making such dreadful faces all the time he danced.

"Mabel, I must insist on an explanation," said her mother.

Mabel burst into tears. Mr. Landon was much distressed, and repeated several times that she certainly must be ill. Mrs. Middleton drew her daughter's hand within her arm, and led her away into her own room. There she made her sit quietly down, and after a few minutes she said: "Now, my dear Mabel, you really must explain what this means."

"Mamma," said she, with a violent effort, "he frightens me."

"My dear child! he—Mr. Landon—frighten you! But how is it possible? How can that gentle, cheerful, tender, devoted man frighten you?"

Mabel hid her face and tried to speak, but could not. At last, taking courage, she said, desperately, "He makes faces!" and then sat still, with hidden face, trembling violently. She did not see her mother's look of blank wonder and dismay. There was a little pause.

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. Middleton at last, "I think you are not quite well." And gently taking Mabel's trembling little hand into hers, she slid her fingers on to the wrist, and felt her pulse.

"Mamma, I am not ill—but he does—he *does*—"

"Oh, never mind that, love. Many people do; there is nothing in that; don't think about it, or care for it—yes, of course—but you shall lie down here quietly on the sofa, and I will send you up some tea and toast. Don't attempt to come down to breakfast."

And Mabel submitted without a word, and allowed her mother to place her on the sofa, and make her quite comfortable. Then, when left alone, she shut her eyes and endeavoured to compose herself. "It is such nonsense," thought she; "there *can't* be anything in it—there is nothing that it *can* mean. How foolish I am to be frightened! I daresay I more than half fancied it."

And then she stopped to wonder at herself for supposing that possible. Fancied that solemn dance, and those horrible faces! Mrs. Middleton sent one of the boys off for the doctor immediately, and told her husband that she had done so, and that Mabel was not well.

Mr. Landon was most properly distressed when he heard of her indisposition, and blamed himself. He feared he had made her walk and talk too much, and he volunteered to go away for the

whole day, and not show himself till tea-time. He would run up to London, and get some of the necessary business settled.

Dr. Philpotts arrived soon after breakfast, and was taken by her mother up to Mabel, who meanwhile had quieted down, and begun to persuade herself that she had been making a great fuss about nothing. She had bathed her eyes, smoothed her hair, and looked much like her usual self when the doctor entered.

"Well," he said, "the young lady does not look as if there was much amiss. Any headache? languor? loss of appetite?"

"No, indeed," replied Mabel, "none at all."

"Let me see your tongue, if you please."

Mabel obeyed.

"A very good tongue indeed, ma'am," addressing himself to Mrs. Middleton.

"She is feverish, Doctor—is nervous, has fancies."

"Hum—nervous is she? has fancies? Let me feel your pulse, my dear. An excellent, healthy pulse as ever I felt in my life! Nobody with such a pulse as that has any *right* to be nervous or to have fancies. I give Miss Mabel a clean bill of health!" And so he took his leave.

"Mr. Landon has gone up to London, my dear," said Mrs. Midd'e'on, still looking very uncomfortable. Mabel gave a start of relief.

"Well, mamma," she said, "don't ask me any more about it, please, and let me teach the children as usual, and help you in everything, as I have not done since I came home."

Mrs. Middleton went down into the Rector's study, where she found him closeted with Mr. Harvey.

"Dr. Philpotts says there is nothing the matter with Mabel," she said.

"That's all right," replied her husband. "But here's Harvey telling me that Mr. Landon is not worthy of her, and is not a man to be trusted!"

"Now that's very unfair," said Mr. Harvey, colouring a good deal. "You asked my opinion, and forced me to say what I thought, and then you blurt it out to Mrs. Middleton, as if I had volunteered it."

"Never mind," said she, smiling, though she did not lose her anxious expression. "I know Mr. Middleton's ways, and I know yours, but Mabel has been complaining herself."

"Complaining!" cried the Rector. "What does she complain of?"

"She says," replied his wife, speaking slowly and reluctantly, "that he makes faces at her!"

"Just exactly what I should have expected," said Mr. Harvey, hastily.

"Now that *must* be nonsense," said the lady, not able to keep from laughing, worried as she was. "You *can't* have expected that!"

Mr. Harvey laughed a little also, and coloured a good deal.

"Well," he said, "of course, I didn't mean exactly *that*. What I meant was—or rather what I should expect—that is—in fact——"

"In fact, you don't know what you *did* mean," said the Rector; "no more does Mabel either, I imagine. Well, well, she'll pass a day like other people to-day, and will miss Mr. Landon's devotion not a little, I imagine. But I am glad Dr. Philpotts pronounces there is nothing the matter with her."

Mabel taught the children, played with Isabel, chattered with her sisters, made a cake for tea, and, before the early dinner-time, had quite recovered her composure. Mr. Landon returned while they were all sitting at tea. He had pleasant salutations for everyone, but went straight up to Mabel, to whom he addressed himself with the utmost tenderness, and beside whom he seated himself. He soon contrived to get hold of her hand under the table, and slipped something on to the "engaged finger." When the pretty little hand made its appearance again above-board a magnificent ring of diamonds and rubies was glittering upon it. After tea he begged her to come out into the garden with him. They strolled about, and if Mabel was a little more silent than usual, Mr. Landon was delightful and talked enough for two. "I do think," he said, after a great deal of charming conversation, "that Mabel is the very prettiest and dearest name in the world."

"You have never asked me to call *you* by your Christian name," answered she, with a delicate little pout.

"No," he said, smiling, "and reason good, too!"

"Why, what is your Christian name? How odd I should not know it!"

"I have none," he replied quietly.

"But that is impossible," cried she, laughing. "You can't have been called Mr. Landon all your life! by all your relations, not when you were a little boy."

He said nothing.

"Do tell me what your Christian name is," she urged.

"But what if I really have none?"

"Nonsense; everybody has."

"Most people have, I admit; but why should there not be exceptions?"

"But there couldn't!"

"Why not?"

"Oh, because—but now, really, why do you talk so? You *know* you have a Christian name. *Everybody* has a name, and, of course, you have too."

"What will our names matter in the heart of Africa or in the depths of a South American forest?" asked he abruptly.

"I don't know," she cried, with some excitement. "Why should that make any difference? But I don't want to go there—I had rather not go to Africa. I had rather remain in England."

He smiled at her very kindly. "You will delight in the life," he said. "I think I see you there now—I know how you will like it."

"But you won't take me there *unless I like?*" said Mabel timidly, and with her heart beating very fast.

"My darling, I will take you *nowhere* unless you like," replied he, with the sweetest smile. But, for the first time, it struck Mabel that there was a cold determination lurking beneath that boyish sweetness, and she turned faint and sick, though the next moment she told herself it was folly, and worse than folly, and hated herself for taking up such a notion:

Then he began telling her about the Highland castle he hoped to buy, where she would reign a sort of chieftainess, and play the "Lady Bountiful" to all the poor Scotch people about them.

"We will build a church, if there is none near," he said, "and schools, and model cottages, and everything that can be thought of to make people wise, and good, and happy."

"That will be delightful," said Mabel.

"And we will employ them; we will not let them be idle; we will find them plenty to do—and then give them balls, and fêtes, and dinners, and feasts, so that the play element of our nature may have full development also. We will not be satisfied with their being *only* industrious and well-behaved, *our* poor people shall be happy."

"How good and kind he is," thought Mabel; "there certainly *is* no one like him in the world." She raised her eyes, beaming with love, to his face, on which the now fully-risen moon shed her cold mysterious light, and there, though she could hardly say how or why, she beheld something that reminded her of the horrible grimaces that she had several times seen him make. He was *not* making them, and yet his countenance did not look quite natural, or like itself; the dreadful shape into which his features could be twisted, and, even more, the dreadful expression that came with that shape, seemed in some strange tremulous way to be lurking behind the normal face, and to be a real existence, only waiting to be called into sight; not a mere action caused by a voluntary play of the muscles. She felt unreasonably frightened, and as if she could not bear to look at him more, and yet an odd fascination kept her eyes fixed on his face; and then it seemed to her as if he, too, knew of that existence impatient to usurp the place of his natural face, and that the knowledge made him uneasy under her gaze.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed suddenly, and put his hand up to his mouth, turning from her as he did so. And Mabel, unable to control herself longer, fled wildly towards the house. She went to her own room to compose herself, and, pacing up and down the floor in a bewildered state, told herself over and over again that she was either the most unfortunate or the most foolish girl in the world.

When at last she felt courage and calmness enough to go down

stairs, she found Mr. Landon already in the drawing-room, holding a skein of worsted, which her mother was winding.

"Do you always run away from people in pain?" said he pleasantly. "I had such a twinge of toothache while we were in the garden, but this charitable lady has cured me at once." And he nodded in a friendly manner at Mrs. Middleton.

"Was that all?" asked Mabel. She could not help saying it.

"All!" he answered. "Is not that enough? What more would you doom me to bear, than the worst of all the ills that flesh is heir to?"

"There are worse things than toothaches," replied Mabel, and wondered as she said the words at the strange solemn voice in which she had uttered them.

"Listen to the oracle," cried her father, laughing.

"There," exclaimed Mr. Landon, rising from his seat, "did not I hold that skein beautifully?"

"You have been used to such work," said Mrs. Middleton, smiling. "You have held skeins, if I mistake not, for your mother and sisters."

"I have none," answered he.

"No? I am sorry for that."

"I have neither father, nor mother, nor brother, nor sister. I doubt whether I have a relation in the world."

"Sir George Weyland knew your father," remarked Mr. Middleton.

"Yes, so he tells me; and there he has the advantage of me. My father died before I was born, and my mother directly afterwards. They were both in Mexico, where my father amassed great wealth as a merchant, which he bequeathed to me, and which I have had the good fortune to double."

"You are not a merchant now, I think?" said Mr. Middleton, not sorry for the opportunity of discussing such matters a little with his future son-in-law.

"No," he replied. "I did not care to go on adding gold to gold. Ten thousand a year should, I think, content any man—or woman either," added he, directing one of his bright sweet smiles towards Mabel.

"I can't *think* how anybody could spend such a sum as that in one year," said Fanny. "It must be very difficult."

Her elders laughed.

"Do you think you could sing to-night, Mabel?" asked her lover. She shook her head.

"I seem to have lost all control over my voice," she replied. "I fear I shall only break down again, as I did before."

"I don't believe the child *is* well, mamma, in spite of Dr. Phillips' opinion," said her father, after regarding her attentively. "She doesn't look a bit like herself."

"I don't think I am, papa, somehow," answered she.

In fact, she was beginning to think that she was *not* well—that she *was* feverish—or that some strange hallucination had come over her senses. When she remembered what had happened in the garden, the panic that had seized her, the extraordinary notion that she had taken up about Mr. Landon's face as she saw it for the first time by moonlight, and then that, after all, it appeared he had only had the toothache, she suddenly thought that the whole thing must really be in herself, and that Mr. Landon had not made any faces at all! If she had put herself into such a state because he had a twinge of toothache, what trifles, on the former occasions, might not have made her take fright, and behave in the foolish way she had done?

But while these thoughts had possession of her bewildered mind, the conversation continued merrily, and when she roused herself to know what was going on round her, she found Fanny was saying:

"Well, *my* happiest associations are with the hayfield."

"And mine," cried Jack, "with the Squire's barn, when we have the ferrets, and *lots* of rats."

"And mine," said the Rector, "with Durham Cathedral."

"And mine," said his wife, "with a rocky seashore."

"And mine," said Mr. Landon, "with Aunt Letty's conservatory."

There was a little laugh at that, and Mabel was eagerly called on by everybody to state what *hers* were, but she hesitated, and would not say.

"If conferring happiness on another is the greatest we are capable of receiving ourselves, as someone says," said Mr. Landon, "yours ought also to be with that pretty little conservatory."

"With which gallant speech—as nothing can surpass it—we will close the evening," said Mr. Middleton. "To bed, young people, to bed."

The bell was rung for prayers, after which they all separated for the night. Mabel was the last of the ladies to go upstairs, as she always "tidied" the room, putting in their proper places all the books and other waifs and strays which had been left about during the day, before she bid her father good night. She now kissed him, and shook hands with Mr. Landon, as they stood chatting together on the hearthrug. The latter naturally enough followed her out of the room, to take a more lover-like farewell at the foot of the stairs, up which she ran, feeling almost happy again, with her candle in her hand.

The former rector had been a rich man, and among the elegancies he had introduced into the Parsonage were several mirrors, one of which was let into the wall at the top of the first flight of stairs. In this Mabel saw her light airy figure, in its floating blue muslin dress, with the blue ribbon in her fair curls, rapidly approaching herself. But that was not all. She saw also Mr. Landon, as she had left him standing in the passage below; and oh, the horror of that sight!

His countenance was like nothing human she had ever beheld. The only idea it conveyed to her affrighted mind was that of an idiot who had suddenly gone mad—an insane idiot! That was all she could think of. A lifelong imbecile, to whom intellect had just that moment been granted, in the shape of madness; and all the horrors of his expression were directed towards her retreating figure, at which he pointed horribly with his extended finger.

IV.

THE candle dropped from her hand with a loud crash, and Mabel knew nothing more till she found herself in her mother's room and in her mother's arms—how she got there she never remembered—trembling violently, and sobbing and gasping on her shoulder.

"Mamma, I cannot marry him—I cannot, cannot marry him," she said at last; and then she grew suddenly calm, and repeated, "No, mamma, I cannot marry him."

"My own dear child, you shall marry no one unless you like it. My dearest Mabel, pray tell me what has happened."

"He frightens me to death."

"But why, my dear love, what can he do that frightens you? he is the gentlest and most lovable of men."

"Mamma, he makes the most dreadful faces, and points at me in the most horrible manner, with his finger," and she extended her own as she spoke, "whenever my back is turned."

"My dearest Mabel!"

"It is *true*, mamma, he does indeed. I cannot marry him; the engagement *must* be broken off."

"My darling, it must be fancy, he can't do *that*; and just imagine breaking off an engagement, and giving that as the reason. No woman ever broke off an engagement on the plea that the man made faces at her."

"I can't help it, mamma—everything must once be first, and not have happened before. Other women may afterwards, though I am the first. But I *couldn't* go into the heart of Africa with him."

"Into the heart of Africa!"

"Yes, mamma, has he not told you? He intends to take me into the heart of Africa, and he says he has no Christian name."

"My dear love, you are dreaming; but what *is* his Christian name? How odd I should never have thought of it. What is it, Mabel?"

"He says he has none, mamma; but if he was to make those dreadful grimaces at me when I looked at him over my shoulder in the heart of Africa, and point at me thus with his finger," and again she imitated the action as she spoke, "mamma, I should die of fright. I am quite sure I should."

Mrs. Middleton looked at her daughter with eyes full of apprehension.

"My darling," she said, "you *are* ill, whatever Dr. Philpotts may say to the contrary. You shall go to bed now, and keep quite quiet, and don't distress or worry yourself. You shan't go with him into the heart of Africa, he shan't make faces at you, and you shan't marry him unless you like. Trust to me, my darling."

"Will you and papa let me break off the engagement?"

"Do you not love him, Mabel?"

"No, mamma, I don't *think* I do; but I'm sure I don't want to marry him. I *should* have loved him had he continued what he appeared during that week at Aunt Letty's; but when he makes those dreadful faces at me I feel nothing but fear, and the idea of marrying him is abhorrent to me, so I don't suppose I can love him *very* much—do you, mamma?"

"Well, dearest, never mind that now. Let me undress you, and settle you comfortably for the night."

So Mrs. Middleton undressed her poor little frightened daughter, and made her drink camphor julep, and then sat by her bedside till Mabel fell fast asleep, when she stole softly away to her own room, where her husband was fast asleep also. But Mrs. Middleton did not close her eyes that night. In the morning early she sent for Dr. Philpotts again. The Rector had an appointment, and was to breakfast away from home, so she would not worry him by telling him before he started that there was anything amiss. Dr. Philpotts expressed great surprise at this second summons.

Mrs. Middleton at once took him to Mabel's room, when he again felt her pulse, examined her tongue, and asked a few medical questions.

"Mamma," said Mabel, "may I say something to him?"

"Certainly, my love."

"Dr. Philpotts, will you please tell me is there any disease that causes people to make faces?"

"To make faces? What an odd idea. No disease that you can have, my dear."

"No, no; but is there any?"

"Well, I knew an old paralytic doctor who was still able to visit his patients, and suddenly when talking to them, sitting, as I might be now, at your bedside, you know, would make very ugly faces at them—ha, ha, ha!"

"But could a young person, quite strong, and going about in apparently good health, do *that*?"

"No, certainly not, Miss Mabel, certainly not."

"Well, then, is there no other disease that could make them do it?"

"There is St. Vitus's dance you know."

"Oh, how does that show itself—*dance*. Do they *dance*, Dr. Philpotts?" And she shuddered as she spoke.

"No, no, they don't *dance*; they turn themselves about and contort themselves, and make horrible faces."

"And supposing they were recovering from this, would they still go on making the faces when they were able to go about, and seemed quite well in all other respects," asked Mrs. Middleton, joining for the first time in the conversation.

"Hardly," said the Doctor. "They might occasionally make faces, but their manners would be very restless and fidgety; and they would be always on the move, and not able to keep still long after they had resumed the command of their facial muscles."

"Then," said Mabel, "there is no way in which *you* can account for a person with quiet, gentle, composed manners and ways, who seems in good health, suddenly making dreadful faces?"

"No way in the world, Miss Mabel, unless she does it for fun," replied the Doctor.

He and her mother soon after left the room, and then he again assured Mrs. Middleton there was nothing whatever seriously amiss.

"She has got something on her mind, she is worried and anxious, and that makes her nervous, and would very probably in time affect her health, but she is quite well at present."

While they were talking Mr. Middleton came into the room. His wife stepped from the window, where they were standing, to account to him for Dr. Philpotts' appearance, signing to the Doctor to remain concealed by the draperies of the curtain for the moment, that her husband might not be startled, but before she could speak the Rector began himself.

"The most extraordinary thing!" said he; "the oddest behaviour! I don't know what in the world to make of it. I have been having a long talk with Mr. Landon in my study; nothing could be more satisfactory, and I was greatly pleased with his generous intentions, and amiable way of expressing them. Then I was coming up to look for you, to see if we could not gratify him by fixing the day, and, turning round at the door to say a last word, I found he was standing there making faces at me, and pointing at me with his finger in the rudest way,"—here the Rector pointed with *his* finger, in imitation, just as poor Mabel had done—"and looking!—I declare to you, Ursula, he made me shudder; he looked more like a demon than a man.—My dear, are you ill? what's the matter?" For Mrs. Middleton had grown quite pale and hastily sat down. Dr. Philpotts came forward from his hiding-place.

"Making faces?" said he. "Why, that's what Miss Mabel was fussing herself about."

In a few words Mrs. Middleton explained what had happened, and all that Mabel had told her, but neither clergyman nor physician knew in the least what to make of it.

"Poor dear Mabel," said Mrs. Middleton, "how frightened she has been! What can we do? How can we do anything? And such a delightful marriage as it seemed, and I am growing quite fond of him myself—and I thought my darling was going to be so

very happy." Here she began to cry, and at the same moment Mabel, who had got up and dressed herself as soon as she was left alone, came into the room. They all felt startled, and looked at each other like guilty conspirators, while Mrs. Middleton hastily dried her tears.

"She's not a foolish child, but a sensible girl, with the whole happiness of her future life at stake," said her father after a moment's reflection, "and concealments are almost always unwise, so I shall tell her exactly what has happened." And he proceeded to repeat the fact of Mr. Landon's behaviour, without, however, any of the comments on it which he thought calculated to distress or alarm her still further.

Mabel got very white as she listened, but her manner was much more composed.

"It is not, then, anything in *me*," she said softly. "I sometimes almost persuaded myself that I had delusions, and I saw mamma thought I was ill."

"And now," said Mr. Middleton, "what would you wish to do?"

"I think," she said timidly, "we might just tell him plainly what we have seen, and find if he can in any way explain it,"—then she began to get agitated again—"but I am quite sure he can't, and I feel so afraid of him, that I don't think I could marry him."

"I will tell him, my dear, and say that you and we think it best that the engagement should be broken off, and then, if there *is* any explanation, he will give it fast enough."

At that moment the party were all startled by the very person whom they were speaking of entering the room. Mr. Landon himself sauntered in, his hands in his trousers pockets, a cheerful smile on his face, his air as pleasant and *dégradé* as ever. He was singing merrily, in his sweet tenor voice,

"And the beating of our own hearts
Was all the sound we heard."

But he stopped rather suddenly when he found the room full of people.

"I beg pardon," he said. "I hope I don't intrude. Mabel, how glad I am to see you up. You are better, then, are you?"

Mabel drew away as he approached her, turning red and white all in a minute, and seemed as if about to leave the room, but was detained by her mother, who put her arm round her waist.

"He has a claim to your presence, darling. I will take care of you, and papa will speak for you; but you must with your own lips confirm what is said; he has a right to demand it."

Meantime Dr. Philpotts quietly took his departure.

"Mr. Landon," said the Rector, "I am sorry that I have something very disagreeable to say to you."

"It will be the first disagreeable word I have heard in this house, sir," replied the young man, with his pleasant smile.

" You have frightened Mabel on several occasions by—by—" the Rector hesitated ; he really did not know how to express himself.

" By what, my love ? " cried Mr. Landon, turning to Mabel.

" Oh, you know," she exclaimed, in a breathless sort of way. " By those dreadful faces you were always making."

" Ah ! " said he, and drew a long breath.

" I witnessed it myself this morning ; but you have terrified my daughter several times. You have made hideous faces at her when her back was turned, and pointed at her in a mocking way."

The Rector made a movement to imitate the action, but his wife could not bear it, and gently kept down his hand with her own.

" The impression you have produced on her mind by this is extremely painful. Her acquaintance with you is very slight. She knows nothing of your former life, and can only guess at your character. The engagement between you was, perhaps, formed with undue haste, and she wishes it to be broken off."

" Not really ? " said Mr. Landon.

" Yes. I am very sorry that things so unpleasant have occurred ; but I don't wonder at her, and she acts with my full approval."

" And there goes my last chance," said he ; " and it has so often happened before ! "

" What ! you have been engaged before ? " said the Rector.

" And often ? " said his wife.

" You dear people, don't be too hard upon me. You know I did not mean *that*."

" Perhaps," said Mr. Middleton, " you have some explanation to offer. You can account in some way for what you have done ? "

" But first," replied he, earnestly, " are you quite sure I *did* do it ? Might not you and she have fancied it ? If there *is* any doubt, will you not give me the benefit of it ? "

" What nonsense ! " said Mr. Middleton ; " as if you must not know yourself whether you did or did not do it."

" Well, yes, I must admit that is true," he said, reluctantly. " Of course I must know." Then there was a little pause.

" Mamma, may I not go ? " said Mabel, in a very low voice. He turned to her eagerly.

" Do you really not love me ? " he said, earnestly. She hesitated, in extreme distress.

" I really don't know," she replied at last ; " but you frighten me dreadfully. And I *could* not marry you unless there was an explanation."

" And how can there be an explanation ? " asked Mrs. Middleton.

" I entirely agree with Mabel," said her father, " that the marriage could not take place unless you account for your extraordinary conduct."

" And even then," said Mrs. Middleton, " she shall not go to *any* part of Africa."

Mr. Landon looked from one to the other, as each in turn addressed him, and then fixed his eyes gloomily on the ground. Mabel made a half-suppressed little sound, and caught hold of her mother's arm.

"I see it; I see it coming into his face," she cried, and, shuddering, hid her eyes.

"You do *not*," he said, almost fiercely, turning towards her; "but you don't love me; you accepted me only for my money."

"Oh, mamma, what a thing to say to me!" cried poor Mabel; "as if *that* were possible."

"No, Mr. Landon, you are unjust there," said Mrs. Middleton, gently. "She is incapable of anything of the kind. She does love you, with the modest preference of a young girl who finds herself chosen by the man she thinks the most superior she has ever seen, and by this time would have felt all that a girl should feel for her lover, if fear had not driven away her affection."

Mr. Landon fixed on Mabel an anxious, longing gaze. "Well," he said at last, with something almost like a sob, though his eyes were dry, "if I explain?"

"We desire nothing better," said Mr. Middleton. "If you explain, and if Mabel is satisfied and feels that she can overlook the past—for her happiness is dearer to us than anything else, and we will not have her pressed nor her life saddened."

"I understand," he said. "I fully understand, and I *will* explain, but I cannot just at this moment; I am too much startled, and could not quite speak with the calmness necessary. But I will write, if you will let me go now; I will write an explanation, and I will return here in one week for my answer. I will do all I can; I will not hurry her. I will write a full explanation, and will give you all a week to consider of it."

Without another word to anybody, or another look at Mabel, he turned round and left the room and the house.

He did *not* return in a week; and to this day the explanation has not arrived.

Five years have passed away since Mr. Landon left the Parsonage into which he brought so much trouble and grief—five years have passed away, and Mabel Harvey is a happy wife. She has changed her name, but not to that of Landon.

Her first engagement could not be called a happy one, nor do I think she had more than that preference for Mr. Landon which ripens into love. Still the shock and grief had been severe, and she was years before she was able to attach herself again, which at last she did most thoroughly, to Mr. Harvey, her father's curate, who had loved her all through.

They had been married for more than a year when circumstances that I need not enumerate led them to visit a private lunatic asylum.

Mabel felt some shrinking fear when she entered the house, but as her husband *had* to pay the visit she made up her mind to accompany him. Dr. S—— showed them over the house, and the patients Mabel saw were so quiet and well-behaved that she began to feel quite comfortable among them.

"This is the library," Dr. S—— said, bringing them into a cheerful apartment, with books and magazines scattered about and half-a-dozen people reading in it.

One of these was busily studying a map, and as Dr. S—— passed him he cried out, "Well, Doctor, I have nearly made my way into the very centre of Africa."

Mabel started at the voice, but the man's head was bent over the map and his face concealed from her. They passed him and were leaving the room, when *something*, she did not know what, caused Mabel to look back over her shoulder. The man was standing up, but he was not standing still—his figure moved and wavered a little, reminding one of grotesque dancing, his eyes were fixed on Mabel, his face was twisted into horrible contortions, he was pointing at her with a long mocking finger. Her eyes met his. She screamed loudly, and then uttering the two words, "Mr. Landon," reeled and would have fallen fainting to the floor, if her husband had not caught her in his arms.

When she recovered her senses she was in the Doctor's private sitting-room, and he, in answer to her eager inquiries, told what he knew of Mr. Landon's history.

"It is his third visit to my home," he said, "and I fear he may now be put down as among the incurables. He knew this madness was coming on five years ago, poor fellow, and had sense enough to seek me of his own accord, and place himself in my hands. He knew it because he found he could not keep from making faces at people and indulging in strange dances when alone. He thought I should cure him again, but here he is still, and though harmless enough when not crossed, there is little hope of amendment."

"And he had been mad for years!" sighed Mabel.

"He was about fifteen when first brought to me, and I had him six years afterwards. That time I really believed him permanently cured. He travelled much, by my advice, and few of his friends knew that his mind had ever been affected. He was a clever man, and likely to distinguish himself, but that is all over now, and I greatly fear that the world outside my home have seen and heard the last of Mr. Landon."

IN THE BLACK FOREST.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND,"
"ROUND ABOUT NORWAY," &c.



FREIBURG.

FEW spots in the Black Forest are more romantically situated than Triberg. In the very heart of the district, it so should of right possess unusual qualities. Here tourists and travellers "most do congregate," and in a double stream of people form Perpetual Motion. The Schwarzwald Hotel is in a constant state of excitement from arrivals and departures, succeeding each other in endless procession; until at last, looking on at the constant ebb and flow one is tempted to exclaim :

" All the world's a stage
And all the men and women merely
players :
They have their exits and their entrances."

Everyone who visits the Black Forest visits Triberg, and most people make a somewhat longer stay here than at other places. For some

reason or other it seems to be looked upon as a sort of haven, where for a time the onward rush, the craving for fresh fields and pastures new, may be laid aside—even if it be but for twenty-four hours. A certain calmness and repose takes possession of the spirit, and one yields to it without regret.

The scene from the Schwarzwald Hotel is enough to tempt anyone to linger. The heights, towering above the building, are a mass of pines, and nothing but pines, range above range, fringing the very outlines. In a cleft or crevice, down comes the rushing torrent in seven distinct falls, emptying themselves in self-made basins, where the water froths and boils and bubbles like a demon's cauldron. Great stones and rocks, moss grown, fern-fringed, twist and turn the water into fantastic forms and shapes. Looking upwards, on each side the chasm is wild and rugged with jagged rocks, zigzagged like a flash of petrified lightning, beautified by innumerable ferns that seek the shade. Delicate pine trees complete the picture, and make the Triberg waterfall perhaps the most romantic in the Black Forest, as it is said to be the most important in Western Germany.

Below the hotel lies the town, sleeping in the valley, surrounded by cultivated slopes that stretch upwards, and distant pine hills that close in the view. The town, thriving and industrious, is given up to straw-plaiting manufactories, abounds in woodcarvers and clock-makers, is full of shops exhibiting choice specimens of handiwork. If you wish to be tempted in this way, better be tempted here than elsewhere, for in the Triberg Gewerbehalle, or exhibition, will be found the best collection in all the Black Forest. Hundreds—it almost feels like thousands—of clocks, are ticking, striking, whirring, chiming all over the place, and your head soon whirrs in concert with the machinery. Whilst a cuckoo suddenly flutters out and excitedly announces with all the power of its lungs that it is ten in the morning, a little trumpeter opposite as suddenly stalks out of his niche, blows an unearthly discord, and announces six at night. Then a dozen cuckoos all strike up at once with the effect of a chromatic scale pressed down together—and you feel that Bedlam would be better than this.

But the exhibition is worth a visit, if only to hear the great mechanical organ at the further end of the room. Amongst its selection it plays the Overture to "Tannhäuser," with full band accompaniment, in a manner that quite puts to the blush the orchestra at Covent Garden. The manager politely hands you a chair; the eyes close; and under the influence of the wild, weird, magnificent composition, towns, exhibitions and noisy crowds sink out of sight in obedience to a magician's wand. Mountains and pine forests, with vast solitudes and gloomy depths take their place, and ring and re-echo with the wonderful music of "Tannhäuser." Suddenly, still in obedience to the wand, imagination sees a white, drooping figure clinging to a cross and a voice rises in supplication; a voice so perfect, so exquisitely pure and sweet, you know it can belong to only one singer—Albani. Then a rugged pathway opens, and you see the trembling figure toiling upwards in that last walk, at the end of which, her sacrifice complete, the world sees her no more.

Suddenly the music stops; the charm is broken; Albani's thrice-lovely voice fades in the depths of the woods; you are violently brought back to earth by the polite manager, who asks if he shall change the barrel for "Madame Angot." With horror overwhelmed you beat a retreat, and beg for no more music.

The Black Forest is famous for these mechanical organs—orchestrions, as they are called—and in some instances they are brought to great perfection. There is a shop close to the exhibition, bearing the name of Lamy Söhne, full of clocks and singing birds and orchestrions, where you may pass half an hour in a fairyland of surprises and all kinds of mechanical music. One morning I went in with an old lady and gentleman—the latter a grave dignitary of the Church of England.

"A very tiring place," said the old lady; "all up and down hill;
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the only fault I find with the Black Forest. Couldn't they level it, my dear?" —to her husband—"or build viaducts or something? Or at the very least, couldn't they organize pony chaises all over the country—like those, you know, that we found so useful at Bournemouth last year?"

"Take a chair, my love," said the old gentleman sympathetically, without committing himself to an opinion. And he placed one for her, whilst the young man in the shop (whose jolly, good-natured face and broad grin delighted one to behold) wound up the orchestrion.

The old lady sat down somewhat heavily from sheer exhaustion, and immediately the chair struck up the lively air of "The Watch on the Rhine," with a decidedly martial influence upon its occupant. She sprang from her seat as if it had been a gridiron, and asked her husband reproachfully if he was amusing himself at her expense, and whether her age was not sufficient to secure her from practical joking.

"Dear me!" cried he, in amazement, looking at the offending chair as though he expected it to walk away of its own accord. "What a musical nation these Black Foresters are! It's music everywhere! The very chairs you sit down upon are full of it."

At this moment the orchestrion struck up a selection from "Don Giovanni," and the old lady recovered her amiability in listening to a really splendid instrument. I left them still enjoying it, marvelling at all the birds and boxes, and thinking each one more wonderful than another.

The waterfall drew one upwards as the pole draws the needle. The water roared and foamed in its course and threw around it spray in a manner almost too refreshing. On one of the rustic bridges, three German students tramping the country were enjoying the rushing water, when one of them, leaning too far over, dropped his hat into the seething pool. At this he appeared much afflicted, and for the first moment seemed inclined to jump in after it, though already swallowed up out of sight. But his companions persuaded him that as he certainly would not recover the hat, whilst he might possibly lose his life, the chances were scarcely worth the risk. His hair was wild, his face covered with scars—a common enough occurrence with German students, who seem to take to fighting, cutting and slashing as a necessary part of education. So giving up all idea of a plunge, the three went tumbling and whistling down hill, now breaking out into a few bars of a volkslied, now making the woods re-echo with shouts of laughter, in response to a remark from one or other—more or less humorous we will suppose.

"The loud laugh that speaks the vacant mind," as Goldsmith has it, may well have exception when three students are out for a holiday, revelling in life, youth and health, in the beauties of nature, the glorious, waving, whispering woods, the grand, free air, the blue skies, the floods of sunshine, the perfect, unrestrained liberty of the

hour ; books, enemies, duels, all thrown to the winds. Day after day wandering at their own sweet will ; rejoicing in youth and strength ; the very lightness of the purse often, in some mysterious manner, contributing to their pleasures by making more uncertain the movements and future of each day. Laying up a store of memories for a time when such excursions will no longer be possible ; when three fast friends bound by close ties, shall have widened the links and loosened the cords of friendship by the cruel force of time, chance and change.

Ah, what a happiness it all is—these golden, glowing days—if we only knew it, what a happiness ! Perhaps because so fleeting.

"There's not a joy the world can give like that it takes away,
When the glow of early thought declines in feeling's dull decay;
'Tis not on youth's smooth cheek the blush alone which fades so fast,
But the tender bloom of heart is gone ere youth itself be past."

Oh, let us make the most of our youth, our golden days. Make fast our friends, revel in our strength, lose no opportunities, leave as little as possible behind for regret. Rejoice, oh young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth. . . . but, as far as possible, put away evil and sorrow from thy flesh. Take thy pleasures to the full, give thanks for opportunities and capacities for enjoyment, so richly bestowed upon thee ; but let them be tempered by innocence and uprightness, and so shalt thou be doubly blessed : blessed at the time, and blessed in the recollection. For remember that if the ways of thine heart and the light of thine eyes be not single, God, for all these things, will bring thee into judgment.

I took the place of the students on the bridge and watched the pouring water and seething foam, until their songs and laughter discreetly died into silence as they entered the public streets. Then on upwards through the wood, overshadowed by the pine trees, until at the end of a rugged climb, the path opened out upon a wide plain, an inn dedicated to the waterfall, a long, white, well-made road, the village and church spire of Schönach in the distance.

The open space, the free air, unchecked by surrounding mountains, was pleasant after the close confinement of Triberg ; the long white road lured one insensibly onwards. The green grass and cultivated fields refreshed one by contrast with the sad forest gloom. So on and on, until at a rough, roadside bench I sat down to rest. Toiling up a steep little path, slowly came an old, old woman, wrinkled and curved ; so ancient, she might have been Methuselah's widow. As she walked she plaited straw, and she stopped and spoke in a sort of patois German, and one had to guess at half her meaning. She said she was nearly ninety, had had a hard life, been many years a widow, and was waiting the time of her departure—it wouldn't be long now.

"How do you live!" I asked, wondering whether the village made provision for its old people in the form of doles or asylums.

"By this," she answered, holding out her straw, some portion of which was rolled up. "I plait this straw and sell it for hats, but plait as fast as I will, I can hardly do enough to buy my daily bread."

"Do you get no help from the parish?"

"No," she replied. "I have nothing given me except a trifle now and then from a neighbour. It has been weary work for me since I lost my husband, and that was fifty years ago."

She looked indeed as if, to her, life had been labour and toil, and she had eaten the bread of sorrows. She stood there the embodiment of antiquity; full of years, yet no doubt still clinging to



NUSSBACH, NEAR TRIBERG.

life, though for her it could yield neither pleasure nor profit. Beggars are rare in the Black Forest; it is a good trait amongst them; though it may be due to the strong arm of the law rather than to any special moral development. Beggars, I say, are rare, and this woman was not a mendicant; but as she stood enlarging upon her poverty and sorrows, it was evident that a trifling gift added to her day's earnings would be received without disfavour. A few half-pence would have called down a shower of blessings, and a departure amidst loud hallelujahs; but just to try the effect of a larger sum, I put into her hand a coin of the value of about a shilling.

The benedictions hovering about the lips were arrested. The old woman looked at the silver piece, then at the giver; then, overcome with emotion, found no words in which to express her thanks, and

turned away in silence. She went down the road with slow and tottering steps, a wonderful exhibition of the tenacity of life under adverse circumstances.

The road from this point wound round, and following in the old woman's footsteps, I soon found myself at the village, buried here in the lonely height, out of sight and sound of the world—even the small world of Triberg. A few scattered houses, a man wading in a blood-red pool, evidently used for dyeing purposes, an inn where the host and hostess sat at a small table at the further end of a big square room and looked as if they were hatching treason or meditating



GUTENBACH.

murder. The landlord was rough and surly, as he drew small (but refreshing) German beer for a few straggling wayfarers. I daresay it was all fancy, but had I slept there that night I should have barred and bolted my door before turning in.

A small church opposite, with a hideous interior, stood on slightly rising ground, and pointed its spire heavenwards. Amongst the simple graves scattered around, happy children, with the carelessness of youth, were playing at hide and seek, startling the sacred precinct with their shouts and gambols, troubled with small thought or respect for the dead. Children know nothing of death : for them the King of Terrors does not exist. But presently comes the age when youth budding into man and maidenhood, looks upon death with sentimental melancholy ; if it comes to them is in the nature of a sacrifice, and so they meet it bravely. Next, full manhood, when death seems too far

off and impossible even to be realized. Lastly, in age, looking forward, it seems to approach with slow and gradual steps; looking back, to have come with wings. Death is realized, but, happily, no longer as a King of Terrors.

Roads right and left beyond the village seemed to give promise of beauty; but I left them for others to explore, and turned back towards Triberg: skirted the wide plain with its depression, that looked as if it might once have been a lake; down once more amongst the overshadowing pines, beside the rushing waterfall, and on to the bridge where the student had lost his hat. That hat, no doubt, was lying at the bottom of the troubled pool; he and his companions were far away by this time; another hat purchased, for which probably he would pay by the loss of a dinner or two. For these students often calculate their expenses to a fraction, and neglect, with the happy disposition of their class, to put down any margin for contingencies.

There is much to be seen about Triberg. No one, reaching it by carriage, should omit to take train to Hornberg, one of the most beautiful and wonderful bits of railway travelling in existence. Magnificent views follow each other in rapid and breathless succession. Often the scene on either side is so grand you are puzzled which way to look; greedy of so many wonders you fear to lose the least. For once you quarrel with the speed of the train and wish it would crawl onwards. You may stand outside on the stage of the railway carriage, and literally hover over deep, glorious precipices, taking care that the guard does not pounce upon you in his perambulations.

Now the train winds far up the hills amongst the woods, over roads cut out of the solid rock; you look down upon slopes of pines into the valley beneath. There the stream is running fast, houses are scattered about, people are working in the fields—all is life, sunshine, and unimaginable beauty. Surely it was of such a scene that Montgomery wrote:—

" If God hath made this world so fair,
Where sin and death abound,
How beautiful beyond compare
Will Paradise be found!"

The line is intersected by innumerable small tunnels, and the train is constantly rushing out of momentary darkness into the full blaze of sunlight, and all the glories of the Black Forest, which culminate in the short railway journey between Hornberg and St. Georgen. You are above the tops of the pine-covered hills; can see beyond them into the depths of the skies; a great expanse of country lies around. The valley is far below, and men and women are dwarfed to Liliputians. As the train rushes on, you have a sensation of freedom, almost of flying, inexpressibly delicious. The beauties of the road are as nothing compared with these beauties of the line. There, after all, you are more or less on the dead level of the valley, and beautiful exceedingly as even that is, the grand feeling of expanse, of

soaring above the hills and the world, given by the railway, is absent. Now rushing round curves and sweeps, and passing from one chain to another, now crossing lofty viaducts and looking sheer down into the valley, you begin to wonder whether all this is reality or a dream from which you will presently awaken.

In returning I went on to Villingen, but the road beyond St. Georgen loses its beauty, and but for the quaint little town at the end, is not worth the journey.

Villingen is a small walled town of great antiquity, but many traces of its age have disappeared under the ravages of fire, &c., too often the case in most ancient towns. Down the long, straight street you might fire a cannon from one end to the other without fear of damage to life or limb. It has a few antiquated buildings; the gateways, an old church, and especially an old Rathhaus, with wonderful windows, and gargoylest frightful in their grinning ugliness—but curious and interesting from extreme age. The edges are everywhere rounded and crumbling away. The circular stone staircase will scarce admit you upwards. You feel that if the town dates back to the year 800, this might well have been the palace of its first youth.

Hearing that it contained a museum of wonderful antiquities, mediæval rooms in good preservation, and gloomy dungeons which outrivalled those of the New Castle of Baden, I endeavoured to gain admittance. First I was directed to a sort of mayor of the town, whose permission was necessary. Arrived at his house, I found an old priest patiently ringing the door-bell, and obtaining no response. We pulled in turns; all in vain. The bell re-echoed through the upstairs corridors, followed by ominous silence. Not even ghostly footsteps responded to the appeals.

"Perhaps he is asleep," suggested the priest.

"Or he may be dead," I returned, by way of improvement, mindful of the laws of progression.

At this moment a door in the passage opened, and a tailor occupying the ground floor appeared on the scene.

"Neither one nor the other," cried he. "His highness" (I will not vouch for the exactness of the title) "has gone to a marriage at Donaueschingen, and will not be home for some time. If you pull the bell down you will get no other answer."

"But where's the wife?" demanded the baffled ecclesiastic.

"Oh, *she* always goes out on her own score when her husband's away," returned the tailor. "Makes it a holiday; looks up her friends; has dinner with one, supper with another; chatters away like a magpie; comes home two minutes before the train's due. Women are such frivolous things—think of nothing but dress and gossip and scandal."

The tone was so genuinely aggrieved, one could but see the tailor spoke feelingly upon the subject. It was very evident, poor fellow, that however much Mr. Tailor might make the garments that have passed into a proverb, Mrs. Tailor wore them.

The priest and I departed together—fellow sufferers at the hands of two persons contracting a marriage at Donaueschingen, which, perhaps, at the end of a month, no one would repent more than they, poor, deluded souls. The old priest went his way, I went mine; in search of the custodian of the museum of antiquities. He lived in a small house opposite the church and the Rathhaus, where his wife kept a milliner's shop—a quiet rendezvous for the Villingen ladies.

Fate was against me that day. The man had gone to Triberg, and the wife would as soon part with her life as with the key, to anyone but the mayor—and he, as we have seen, had gone off to a wedding. So, giving up the chase after the beautiful, the curious, and the



FREIBURG.

antique, I contented myself with a visit to the hospital. This, too, was a strange old place, beautiful in its age. Cloisters there were, with ancient, lovely Gothic windows and pillars, and walls with inscriptions and frescoes and portraits of dead-and-gone bishops and monks. But an air of sickness, disease and death lurked about the place; a subtle feeling of infection and danger; it was dull, gloomy, and not very clean: and the porter who opened the door was a nightmare in himself, poor fellow. A very short visit was more than enough, and I hurried out into the pure light, the free air of heaven.

Down near the station a river ran its course, clear as crystal. It literally swarmed with fish, and made one long for a little sport. That being out of the question, I sat me down on the bank and watched

their movements, and revelled in the cool, green grass, the bright sun and blue sky—all the beauties of this fair world; listened to the chirping of myriads of grasshoppers; and, to while away the time, indited a letter to a friend in command of one of Her Majesty's training brigs: who probably at that moment was cruising about the Channel, ordering the master-at-arms, with the assistance of the boatswain's mate, to administer wholesome castigation to a refractory youth. Or, if a storm was raging, putting in a word now and then to the boys drilling aloft; walking the decks, as good Lady W. firmly believed (a joke too good to be lost) with an umbrella over his head, to protect himself from showers that never came from the clouds.



OLD GATEWAY, FREIBURG.

My epistle, naturally, was dated *Villingen*, and he had the abomination to reply with an attempted pun: "Yours duly received from the town with the *Villingous* name."

At last I saw the train from Donaueschingen puffing along the line—perhaps bringing the truant mayor, whose absence had caused me the loss of the wonderful museum of antiquities. But were they so wonderful after all? I made up my mind, like the fox and the grapes, that they were unworthy a regret. So I gathered up my possessions, and prepared to migrate.

This town of Donaueschingen, eight miles from Villingen, is interesting as possessing, it is said, the source of the classic Danube. In the garden of the Prince of Fürstenberg is a round basin filled with crystal water. That water, for ever bubbling up, overflows, and is conducted by a subterranean passage into the Briegach—the river that, at Villingen, was so tantalizingly full of fish. From this point the Briegach takes the name of the Danube.

And what a wonderful course it follows thenceforth! What a glorious river it is, this "blue Danube." How picturesque and beautiful from Ratisbonn to Linz; how grand and wild right down from Linz to Vienna; with its rugged banks, its towering rocks, its grey, frowning chasms, its curves and rapids, its monasteries perched on the summits of wild precipices, looking into the dark, deep waters; its Valhalla, with its glittering, endless flight of steps: until, reaching Vienna, it sweeps past the gay capital, a proud, silent stream, wending its way onwards to the Black Sea.

To return to Villingen. The train puffed into the station, and ere-long I found myself back in Triberg. In the interval of absence "men had come and men had gone;" there were new faces at the table d'hôte as well as old. The gathering was large, the dinner, as usual, a slow and solemn waste of time. Expressions of dissatisfaction at the hotel were often heard, but for my own part I saw little to complain of. The only nuisance was in the shape of a young Englishman, who every evening sat down to the piano in the reading-room—where a little silence and quiet was wanted after dinner to digest the latest newspaper—and for an hour would strum through a series of performances more or less extemporized, and more or less (chiefly more) annoying. It is an occasional wonder where some people acquire a certain courage, an absence of good feeling, of the consideration due to others' rights. This youth, night after night, was an unmitigated nuisance, yet would turn round at the end of his performance with a smile of benevolent satisfaction, the self-constituted hero of the evening.

The time came to say good-bye to Triberg. I left it early one morning by the diligence that started from the post office at seven, and was sufficiently lucky to get the one outside place next the postboy. These outside places are not to be secured beforehand in the Black Forest, and you can only make sure of them by being first in the field. Some diligences have one or two outside places, others have half a dozen.

It was a glorious morning and the sun already gave promise of a hot day. We swept up the steep road, lined with pine trees, with a speed that was slow and stately, in spite of the four horses, as lazy and contrary this morning as they could be. The postboy lost half his time in whipping them up with a very primitive weapon; and the lash, constantly coming into contact with the harness, demanded, every two minutes, a fresh supply of whip cord. This kind of thing is irritating, and the mystery was, how the postboy kept his temper, and with every diminishing yard of string grew more and more smiling and amiable.

But in time we found ourselves skirting the wide green plain above the waterfall, and galloping over the road where I had met Methuse-lah's widow. Sweeping round the curve in good form (the horses on the level road had become tractable) we soon came to a halt at the village post office. Here we took up the mail bags, and started off

again. The drive now opened up wide and extensive views. For the moment we had left the immediate neighbourhood of woods and forests, and seemed to have climbed above hills and valleys into other regions. The air was fresh and sparkling, though the heat of the sun was already tropical, and it was a question whether, after all, the inside passengers had not the best of the bargain. The view over long stretches of country, bounded by far-off, shadowy hills, was for the moment somewhat barren and uninteresting. One amiable old German excitedly put his head out of the window and pointed to the highest mountain in the Black Forest; but it was difficult to get up any enthusiasm for an elevation so distant that its outlines could scarcely be traced.

Small villages broke our journey into mild dissipations and varieties; road-side inns offered tempting refreshments to man and beast; an invitation the postboy never failed to make the most of; until at last we reached the quaint, picturesque village of Schönwald. It is a colony of watchmakers, and you might hear and see them at work in their factories and houses, standing in shirt-sleeves at their tables, singing in rhythm to the tap of their hammers, with windows open to the free air and blue sky. They looked cool, calm and happy, a perfect picture of contented life. Our arrival was the event of the morning—probably of the whole twenty-four hours; we gave out mail bags and took in others; a small crowd quickly flocked round us—to transfer their polite attention and ardent gaze to the post office, as soon as we were off again.

From Schönwald we still ascended, until, at the inn Zum Kreuz we reached the top of the pass, the summit of the hill Sommerau, and a height of 3,500 feet above the level of the sea. This spot forms the watershed between the Rhine and the Danube. Distant views met the eye; undulating plains, somewhat barren; the highest mountain still visible; far-off ranges of hills and forests, but no near object calling for attention. A great stretch of country without any special feature to recommend it or to cause emotion. It was difficult to agree with the amiable old German, who again put his head out of window and declared that he thought this one of the grandest views in the whole of the Black Forest.

Now descending a winding road—as the old lady had said in the Triberg music shop, the Black Forest is all up and down hill—we soon lost the barren prospect. Softer outlines surrounded us, hills verdant and gently sloping, rural scenery, broken and diversified. At length the church spire and houses of Furtwangen, reposing in a hollow, watered by a flowing stream, sloping hills stretching above and around the town for a great distance. Clattering down the steep hill, the diligence came to a stand at the post office; the postboy threw off the reins with an air that showed his sense of importance and responsibility, the mail bags were discharged, and the officials became immersed in the weighty duty of sorting letters. Those who came to

the window to ask a question were greeted with a look and a growl that hurried them away as effectually as if a loaded pistol had been pointed at them ; and the offence was not repeated.

Furtwangen is given up to industry. Its inhabitants all look, in a quiet way, as if, for them, the "pleasures of idleness" had no attractions. Watch and clock manufactorys abound ; much wood-carving ; and here some of the best orchestrions are made, and exported to all parts of the globe. One maker said that he sent many to Russia, America, and even the Colonies, which alone gave sufficient occupation for all the resources at his disposal. There is an exhibition here also, but it is very inferior to that of Triberg.

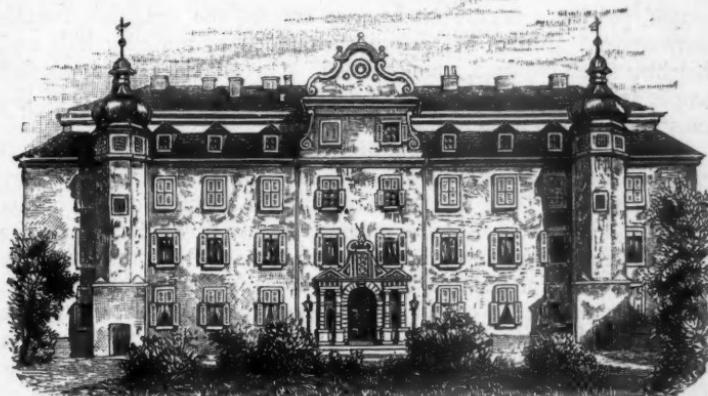
From many of the windows you might see—as we had seen at Schönwald—men at work in their sleeves ; carving, making clock-works, putting them together ; all so busy and cheerful, looking so cool and happy as they sang at their work, whilst we were blazing in the outside sunshine, one almost felt inclined to envy the even tenor of their lives. In one of these houses lived the youth whose broad, jolly, good-natured face had so "fetched" me at the music shop at Triberg. He and his father divided their time, in turns, between Triberg and their factory, just outside Furtwangen. I had promised the son that I would look him up at Furtwangen, and he should take me over the factory. But to-day, as chance would have it, both father and son were absent. All I saw, in an upper room, was the comely mother, surrounded by cages of mechanical singing birds, now silent ; ladling out steaming soup at a round table, to an army of little hungry open mouths, by no means as silent as the birds. She was distressed at the absence of both husband and son—a rare occurrence ; and I could only promise to repeat the visit if ever opportunity arose. In her hospitable impulse, she would have pressed some of the steaming soup upon me, and seemed distressed that I would not walk away with half a dozen of the bird-cages—payment was not in the least necessary. I saw at once that the good woman had transmitted her nature to the son, and even with interest.

So declining the soup and the bird-cages, I went quietly back down hill, wondering if ever before there had been so hot a day. The white roads seemed to glow like a furnace, and there was no shade anywhere. And Furtwangen, though picturesquely situated amidst the sloping hills, had little in the form of antiquity to attract attention, beyond a row of quaint houses and shops with dark, gabled roofs, that did their best to enliven the banks of the little river Brieg.

After a halt of two hours or more, we were once more ready for departure. The new diligence proved accommodating. There were outside seats for half a dozen passengers, and therefore room enough and to spare for all. We started with four strong horses, and a post-boy who had grown grey and old and fat in the service, and knew how to drive. And how he did drive ! Ascending for some distance, then crossing a mountain pass, presently a full view of the glorious

Simonsthal burst upon everyone's astonished and enraptured vision. This descent into the valley was perhaps the grandest, most sublime bit of travelling, yielding the most vivid impressions, of all I saw in the Black Forest.

From a great wooded height, we gazed far down into a long, wide, cultivated vale. The opposite hills were high and diversified. Slopes, now great stretches of forest, now fields and orchards, now barren and rugged, seemed to spread before one in endless succession. But the general impression was that of a valley fertile and picturesque in the highest degree; a smiling garden of immense extent. Now we passed through cuttings in the woods, and now in short zigzag roads dashed downwards; so near the edge of the slopes, and with such speed, turning the sharp angles so rapidly, that it required faith in one's coachman to preserve a calm exterior.



ST. MARGHERITA.

Down we went, glorious woods and fields around us; a stream running through the valley; a cataract tumbling from the very summit of the opposite hills; houses and villages perched so far above the world, it seemed as a nightmare or a dream to reach them. At last our zigzag descent gave place to a long level road, shaded by trees. Splendid chestnuts grew in abundance, rich apples and luscious plums. Bowling along, we had only to put out the hand and grasp the fruit.

The sun shone fiercely overhead, throwing light and shadows upon the landscape; the skies wore a celestial blue only seen on such days and in spots so lovely; the air came laden with scent as we galloped along; now a plum or an apple was gathered from a tempting overhanging branch. They grew in myriads, these plums and apples. It seemed that we were in fairyland, and here certainly was food for Paradise. It was all too beautiful; one of the loveliest days of

the world, gilding one of the loveliest spots of earth. A day and a drive to be remembered.

After awhile we came to the first break in our journey, with a ten minutes' halt for rest and a change of horses. And here, too, alas, we also changed our postboy. A small primitive village, where people were threshing or beating grain; curious signs outside the bakers' shops; the windows of many a small cottage adorned with flowers and vines. Finally, a little church brought one to the end of the village—and the end of life.

But the day was too glorious and sunny for meditative thought, and we started onward with fresh horses and fresh spirit. The road gradually assumed more of life and animation. Quaint villages now and then varied the scene; the great beauty of the valley had given place to a wider plain, fields and distant ranges; until at length, passing a factory or two, we entered the straggling, beautifully situated town of Waldkirch, surrounded by romantic hills and heights, forest-crowned, ruin-crowned. On all sides were wooded slopes and grand undulations, which make of Waldkirch one of the most picturesque spots in the Black Forest.

Under the shadow of one of the hills there stood the hotel and pension of St. Margherita. I had meant to push on that night by train to Freiburg; but falling in love with the situation of the house, with the house itself, with the romantic beauty of Waldkirch and its whole surroundings, it was impossible to leave. Even then the sun was sinking behind the hills in a haze of glory, flecking the sky with bright cloudlets that every moment changed colour, and completed the setting of the beautiful picture. In the gathering twilight the outlines of the hills grew soft and dark, the ruin-crowned height before us was fading into mystery. A sunrise in the morning from this spot would be something never to be forgotten. Therefore, unable to leave, I stayed.

The house itself had much to do with this remaining. A large, rambling building, with great rooms, and immense corridors, and wide, old, carved staircases. Ages ago it had been a monastery or nunnery, I forget which. Year after year, age after age, nuns had walked these corridors like spectres from another world: and, silently as spectres, must have stolen across to the quaint old church adjoining. Or perhaps—who knows?—there may have been an underground passage connecting the monastery with the sacred edifice.

The very sensation of sleeping in this wonderful old house was almost enough to bring one to Waldkirch: certainly enough to detain one when there. And when darkness had fallen, the great gloomy corridors were peopled with a whole army of nuns. From every doorway seemed to issue a veiled and hooded figure.

But modern innovations had crept in. Gardens and vineyards, and lovely children playing about, making the old place ring again with their happy careless laughter. Many people were staying in the house, and these children were amongst them. They were visions

of beauty, in harmony with the surrounding scenery—the mother herself perhaps the loveliest and most distracting vision of all.

When the shades of night had fallen, and all surrounding nature was shut out in the deep silence and mystery of darkness, for want of better occupation I strolled through the town. The inhabitants were taking their ease at their doors. Young men and women patrolled the streets in wide links, arm in arm, making the most of youth, liberty and happiness. Oil lamps were quaintly strung across the streets, in pristine fashion, just as we may see them in some of our rare country places, where the modern misery of gas has not yet penetrated. It all seemed very unworldlike. As regards feelings and impressions, one might have been a thousand miles away from a civilized capital. Above and beyond the houses and the precincts of the town, a black line stretched itself, yet more dense than the starry heaven immediately above; and there, one knew, were the silent woods, long stretches of darkness, where the trees whispered to each other in a language unknown to man. But in the town, by contrast, there was light and life and animation. Gradually, even there it subsided. Lights were put out; songs and choruses ceased; youth and age disappeared; shutters were swung to and bolted; the streets were left to the night and the stars and the benediction of the skies.

I, too, went my way. Entered the great silent house; with a solitary light that threw ghostly shadows, threaded the great wide staircase, and long, deserted passages. In every corner lurked a nun; every door was opening, to send forth a silent, hooded, sable figure, as it seemed to the imagination, excited by the darkness and the influence of the past upon these places. But whoever or whatever lurked there, they came and went with the silence of death: and the ghosts that flitted about cast no shadows.

Alas for the sunrise of the next morning! The glories of the previous day had culminated in a supernatural effort. I woke to the melancholy music of a downpour that might have heralded a second deluge. Ruins, hills, undulations, wooded slopes, all the beauty and romance of Waldkirch—everything was buried in a wet, vapoury mist that mingled with the torrent from the clouds. A change indeed, sad and disappointing, but like much of life, inevitable. It had to be borne.

Breakfast over, and in company with a porter, conveying my luggage in a sort of covered baker's cart, I waded through torrents to the station. Ere long the train was making way through all the lovely and picturesque scenery, spoilt and blurred this morning by rain and mist. Then, in due time, it stopped at the quaint, picturesque, old-world town of Freiburg, with its ancient towers, its vineyards, wooded slopes, and ruin-crowned heights: and above all, its beautiful cathedral, full of grace, harmony, and just proportions, with its lovely open spire, and a surrounding view from its belfry that, once seen, is seen for ever.

A NIGHT OF DISASTER.

IT was in all the rush and excitement of the last "Exposition Universelle," at Paris, that a young Englishman was finding it rather slow in his spacious apartments in the Rue Royale. For one thing, he knew hardly a soul in that gay metropolis, and the few souls that he did know were away enjoying their summer holidays. You will ask why Bertram Wilde, the Englishman in question, stayed in Paris. The answer is that he was obliged to do so ; or, if not really obliged, he thought he was, which comes to the same thing for all practical purposes.

He was about twenty-five years old, and the son of a country gentleman down in well-wooded Hampshire. His father had wanted him to "enter the Church," but wilful Bertram had expressed himself decidedly averse to the idea. As a matter of fact, there was not the least reason—pecuniarily speaking—why young Wilde should engage in any calling or profession at all ; but he was luckily saved from idleness by his own native indisposition to rust and go to seed and do nothing.

Well, here he was, settled in Paris, experiencing a mixture of sensations, in which the sense of loneliness and a desire to fly away were perhaps predominant. He had tried going out and amusing himself, but he found that theatres, concerts, public balls, the exhibition itself and all its concomitant attractions simply made him more distressed than before. Neither the porte d'entrée of the Palace on the Champs de Mars, nor the foyer of the Opera House could attract him. Pleasure-seeking without a companion is always a dreary business, and at that period there was one companion, and she only, whose presence he longed for, and she was far away. So he did his work, as much of it as he felt inclined for, during the day, and moped and gave himself up to his own thoughts at other times.

But he was not entirely melancholy ; far from it. Rather he was in that state of subdued excitement arising from being drawn in two different directions at the same time. A very strong attraction was pulling him in the direction of Antibes and the shores of the Mediterranean. Can you doubt what that attraction was ? Bertram Wilde was a lover, and an accepted lover, and at that delightful French watering-place of Antibes, where even winter strikes with no icy blast, but the blue tideless sea shines warm and bright in mid-December, there was a young English girl looking out for him, and keeping up an exceedingly lively correspondence with the Rue Royale in the interval before he made his appearance. And now you can understand why time hung heavily on Bertie Wilde's hands, and why

he chafed and fretted under the restraint and loneliness of his solitary chambers.

Why did he not run down to Antibes? Simply because he had devoted himself with all the passion of an inexperienced amateur to the cause of art: he had taken it up as his profession, intending to stick to it, and he had been living in Paris for more than a year and working studiously in order to get on in his new calling. And he had got on very well; one or two of his pictures had appeared at the Salon, and one or two others had been hung in the rooms of the "Société Générale des Beaux Arts." What was keeping him in Paris in those sultry August days of 1878 was just the fact that he had been given a commission to execute a painting of a battle scene in the Vendéean war, by a rich Burgundian patriot, and he had felt it his duty to stay in his studio and finish it before rushing down to the place where pleasure and inclination both called him—the sandy bay of Antibes.

The English season at Antibes is the winter-time, while the French season is the summer. The Spaniards come pretty regularly both summer and winter, to enjoy this smaller "queen of Mediterranean watering-places." Bertie Wilde's first visit to the place had been in the winter of 1877, and it was then that he met, saw, and was conquered by Miss Helen Graham, who was living with her family in a villa some miles from the town and close to the sea.

Up to this time his courtship had run smoother than it had any right to do, as he had been happily betrothed with the full consent of Helen's parents within a few weeks of first seeing her. It is true, there were other aspirants to her hand. Two Englishmen had gone half demented with admiration for her before Wilde appeared on the scene; but they had been repulsed with severe loss, and had disappeared. Then a young Spaniard, Señor Basil Garcia, of the bluest Castilian blood, was—Bertie knew—in love with her, and had not by any means relinquished his attentions at the time of which I am writing.

As an accepted lover, he could of course snap his fingers at other suitors; all the same, there were times when Bertie, knowing the fiery Spanish nature, and having special reasons to distrust Señor Basil, felt certain uncomfortable misgivings. Not for himself; he was as bold as a lion; but who knew what vengeance disappointed love, working in a fierce southern heart, might not possibly be led to wreak on another a good deal dearer to him than himself? But such thoughts Bertie always dismissed as too dreadful: after all, there was law in France, and the Spaniard was a civilized being, who would not be likely to adopt desperate measures, and get himself guillotined for his pains.

It so happened that mischief-making Fate had brought Wilde and Señor Garcia into hostile contact with each other, quite apart from any question with regard to Helen Graham. And this was how it occurred.

There is—or was—a flourishing English club at Antibes, numbering in all about three hundred members. When Bertram Wilde was wintering at that place, he was asked to act temporarily as secretary, not a very onerous post. The real secretary was away for two months. Bertie yielded with his usual good humour, and acted in his official capacity to the satisfaction of the little English community of voluntary exiles gathered at Antibes in the December of 1877.

But, as luck would have it, his lot fell on unquiet times. The English club was not entirely confined to British subjects, as several French and Spanish gentlemen, and even ladies, were admitted as honorary members. A certain member of the old French aristocracy, Comtesse de Perpignan, took it into her head that she would like to be enrolled as honorary associate of this same club. So she was “put up” for election by two obliging friends among the English community, and in due course was balloted for.

Alas! for the little reverence paid to rank in these levelling days. Two black-balls were discovered in the box, and these two black-balls were sufficient to exclude the Comtesse de Perpignan. On inquiry it turned out that there was some method in the madness of the ungallant gentlemen who had voted against the Countess; there had been a scandal a long time before in Parisian society, which had forced her to leave the centre of French fashion and gaiety “under a cloud.” The fact was that the Countess’s husband had died in a mysterious and sudden manner, and suspicion had chosen to accuse the wife of having poisoned him. The suspicion never got so far as a court of law, but the Countess had thought it prudent to live away from Paris afterwards. This story had been got hold of by some members of the English club, who thereupon felt bound to exclude her from the untainted atmosphere of its salons.

The Countess was indignant. She was an elderly dame, and had given great entertainments to the English visitors, a grand bal masqué among the number, and she naturally resented the affront. Señor Garcia was one of her intimate friends, and he took steps to carry her resentment into some practical shape. Not knowing who the actual persons were who had black-balled the Countess, all he could do was to call on the secretary of the club—at that time Bertie Wilde—and very politely challenge him to a duel.

“What!” said Bertie, in perfect surprise at the idea; “you want to call me out, because somebody else has insulted somebody who is a friend of yours.”

“Señor,” loftily replied the Spaniard, who, unlike most of his countrymen, spoke excellent English, “an affront to the Countess is an affront to me. There is nobody else I can appeal to for satisfaction but the president of this club. Alas! there is no president; so I must come to the secretary—to you,” with a profound bow.

“And what if I refuse to come out when you call me out?” asked Bertie, blandly.

Refuse ! The idea had not occurred to the foreigner. Refuse to fight a duel ! Such poltroonery was unimaginable. Yet Bertie did refuse, and was of course backed up in his refusal by all the English members of the club, who made the quarrel with the Spaniard their own. Finally, he was obliged to satisfy himself with the remark that "It must be an English custom, then, this insulting a lady and refusing to give satisfaction"—a remark for which Bertie felt strongly inclined to kick him down the stone steps of the club. Señor Garcia went away with an ugly look in his eyes.

All this happened before the time that Wilde made the acquaintance of Helen Graham, and therefore before he and Señor Basil Garcia were, or could possibly be considered, rivals in love matters. But it was an unfortunate thing that luck should have made them enemies before there was any real cause for it. All that actually came of the black-balloting affair at the time was that Garcia scowled at young Wilde whenever he happened to meet him, and Bertie, for about a month after the challenge, carried a revolver in his pocket.

At about nine o'clock on the night of one of these same hot August days of 1878, Bertie was seated in his studio. The apartment was elaborately and artistically decorated, but as a general rule he did not patronise this room except when he was actually painting. Opening out of the studio was a nicely-furnished sitting-room, and this was his usual habitat. However, to-night he was ensconced in an easy-chair in the studio, and was rather astonished when the pretty little femme-de-chambre appeared, and announced that a gentleman was below and "requested the honour of an interview with Mr. Wilde."

"Ask him to send up his card," said Bertie, and wondered which of his friends, or what begging impostor, would call on him at that hour.

Before the order could be executed, however, the visitor had stepped quickly and lightly into the room, had waved his hand loftily to dismiss the little chambermaid, and closed the door after her himself. Then he turned to Wilde. His "get-up" was faultless, from top hat and cane held in his gloved left hand, to curled moustache and glossy-silk cravat ; and he was smiling blandly.

It was Garcia. Luckily for Bertie, his nonchalant nature prevented him starting or showing any lively marks of surprise. He rose from his seat, feeling—it must be confessed—a little uncomfortable, and, motioning to a chair, begged his visitor to be seated. But Garcia remained standing, and still smiling ; so Wilde stood also.

"Señor will excuse the liberty," began the Spaniard ; "but I have a message, a letter, which I was requested to deliver to your hands, with my own. That is the reason of my venturing to intrude at this time." Then, as Bertie simply started—"Señor is surprised ?"

"Excuse me," said Bertie, recollecting himself, "do sit down ; you are quite welcome—at least," he went on, remembering the unpleasant incident connected with the balloting, the challenge, and the

rivalry for Helen, and feeling bound to speak forcibly, "you must be aware, señor, that I cannot forget ——"

But Señor Garcia interrupted him. "All that is gone, as far as is in my power to obliterate the past. I beg you will let bygones be bygones. I have come here on a friendly mission. May I trust that señor will receive me as a friend?"

"Willingly," said Bertie; but he still felt, in spite of himself, suspicious of this fair-spoken rival who had wished to make a target of him, and who now had such excellent additional reasons for bearing him ill-will.

Then Garcia disclosed his mission. He was the bearer of a letter from the Countess, in which that aristocratic and insulted lady played a most Christian and forgiving part. She had heard—so she wrote—of the unhappy quarrel between Señor Garcia, one of her best friends, and Monsieur Wilde, the distinguished English gentleman and artist. She could not allow herself—though she still felt deeply the affront put upon her by some obscure member of the Antibes Club—to be a source of enmity, and—alas!—perhaps even duels, between two such gentlemen, and she begged to assure M. Wilde that she had no knowledge of the challenge till a few days ago. She had at once begged Señor Garcia to drop the matter, as far as she was concerned, and she should be happy if she could be the means of reconciling two persons so well worthy of her esteem and of mutual friendship; and she begged to subscribe herself, &c., &c.

What was Bertie to think of this strange missive? What was the Countess to him, or he to the Countess? "Deuce take it," he thought to himself, "does she think I'm going to prosecute her for poisoning her husband?" But he obviously had nothing to do now but to accept the missive in the spirit in which it was, or appeared to be, written. So he assured Señor Garcia that he had never felt any unfriendly feelings, and that he would hope to answer the Countess's letter in a manner worthy of so agreeable a communication. Meanwhile, he begged Garcia to convey to her his sentiments of respect, &c., &c.

Garcia was bland politeness itself. He was charmed, enchanted, ravished. So would the Countess be. No, he could not stop, with a thousand thanks to Monsieur for his politeness. He was engaged to the reception of the Spanish Ambassador. He must go at once. When should he have the pleasure of seeing M. Wilde at Antibes again?

And he stroked his moustache with his jewelled fingers—for his right hand was without a glove.

"I shall be going down," said Bertie, carelessly, "on Tuesday week, by the night train. I am expected then at ——" He stopped, and hesitated.

The Spaniard helped him out. "At the Château Y——, doubtless?" he observed, smiling still.

"At the Château Y——," replied Bertie, with some hauteur. If the Spaniard chose to begin a conversation about Helen it was his own fault. *He*, Bertie, had no reason to shirk it.

"And—Monsieur Wilde will excuse my asking—Monsieur Wilde is then about to marry 'la belle Anglaise'? Is it not true?"

"Certainly, it is quite true," said Bertie, and then he thought to himself, "So that was the object of your visit, Señor Garcia, was it? You might have found *that* out without coming here." His distrust of the suave Spaniard had returned in full force.

"I congratulate you on your good fortune," Garcia said. "But I am detaining Monsieur. I have been delighted to have the pleasure of seeing Monsieur, of being the recipient of his distinguished messages, of having made a reconciliation with one so worthy of respect. A beautiful landscape that! After Eugéne Delacroix, is it not?"

And, with what Mr. Tennyson has called "haughty Spanish grace," he finally bowed himself out, and down the stairs, and disappeared.

"I expect I shall have to carry that revolver again," remarked Bertie to himself, thoughtfully.

On the Tuesday week he set out for Antibes, as he had told Garcia he intended doing.

But the night before leaving Paris he dreamt a dream. He could not get to sleep till early morning, and when he slept his brain was haunted by strange imaginings. He was on a wide sea, in a little boat, and no shore was to be seen as far as eye could reach. Who was in the boat with him? He could not tell. All he knew was that a tempest was raging, that the wind howled and the breakers dashed over the frail bulwark, and every moment he expected the rapidly-filling bark to sink beneath the waves. Yet it did not sink, but seemed to ride the billows by some supernatural power. In the bows there sat a figure, the figure of a woman, but the face he could not see. For some reason he felt convinced it was Helen, his own Helen, and he tried to call her name, but he could not, and then he rose to move towards her, but he was chained to his seat, and, struggle as he might, he could not change his position. And all this time the wind and the waves were rising higher and higher, till at last a breaker came towering with crest of angry foam just over the frail bark, and as it broke on the boat he heard the figure give a despairing cry, and then it was washed overboard. And he too tried to shriek, but could not utter a sound. Then he tried to leap towards her, but he was unable to move. And as the figure—the face still hidden, but he had no doubt who it was—floated for a moment on the wave, what was his horror to see a hand, white and jewelled, rise out of the sea, and clasp the figure, and drag it down! Even in that moment of agony he seemed to have time distinctly to observe that hand—a peculiar, yet somehow familiar hand, very

white, but with large veins standing out on it, and to notice the exact nature of the ring on the finger—gold, with alternate rubies and diamonds. And then the agony was too great, and he awoke!

He could sleep no more that night. He rose, dressed himself, completed his packing, and set himself down to read a book. "Surely my nerves are out of order," he said to himself; "was that Helen in the boat?" and then he became angry with himself for thinking of his dream. "What superstitious folly! She will laugh to-night when I tell her. Shall I tell her? No, it might possibly frighten her. Thank Heaven, she is not given to idle superstitious terrors. Nor am I generally. What a peculiar hand! Where have I seen it before? And that ring—I could recognise that again anywhere."

Directly daylight came—and how slow it was in coming!—Bertram took up his painting materials and set to work for an hour or two before breakfast. By this means he succeeded in quieting his imagination, and by the time breakfast was ready he was able to take a more tranquil view of things.

That evening he was travelling through the flat and desolate country that lies between Marseilles and Antibes, where the railway runs, now close to the shore of the Mediterranean and now diverging inland for some way among the stony plains and stunted trees of the Department of the Var. Was he happy? I can hardly say. He was soon to meet his beloved after a separation of months. He was looking forward with all a lover's longing to the meeting, and yet he was more excited than happy. Somehow or other, the thought of that disturbing nightmare would cross his brain, and at Toulon, where tickets were demanded from the travellers, he found himself carefully observing the conductor's hands, to see if they bore resemblance to those of the dream. Again he felt vexed at his own folly, yet, as the train sped onwards through the darkness towards his destination, he became more and more uneasy.

"Thank Heaven!" at last he exclaimed. He was the only passenger in his first-class compartment, and he had seen the lights of a little town which he knew was only a few miles from Antibes. The train dashed past it, and was once again buried in fields. Then it emerged on to a high embankment skirting the sea, which served both as a railway viaduct and as a dyke to keep off the storm-waters from the land.

This was a point he had been waiting for. Antibes was not five miles ahead now, and from this lofty embankment he knew the Château Y—— was visible, where Helen was waiting for him, and looking—must she not be?—for the line of moving light which bore her lover onwards to her embrace.

He had risen from his seat, and was standing against the window, peering anxiously out into the night. It had begun to rain, and the wind was rising. The train made a slight lurch, and he steadied him-

self against the carriage-seat for a moment with his hand. Before he could look out again, the carriage gave a violent jolt, which threw him to the floor; and ere he could do anything to recover his position, or even realise what had happened, the whole solid framework had tilted bodily over to the left and plunged down the embankment.

Even while the carriage was taking its fatal plunge headlong, Wilde had time to think, "What will Helen do if I am killed?" and there his thoughts ended, for he was buried beneath a pile of wreckage that rose twenty feet above him in the air.

But he was not killed. It was a miracle that he was not, but all the mischief that had befallen him was that he was stunned for a few minutes. When he came to he found a stranger lifting him out of the wreck, and saying,

"Il n'est pas mort, pauvre jeune homme—il n'est pas mort!"

"No, I am certainly not dead," said Bertram, and he tried to lift himself up. He was badly bruised, and had an ugly wound on his head. Other injuries he had none. Soon he set to work to help in extricating other passengers who had fared less fortunately. The smash was a complete one. Engine, tender, and carriages lay thirty feet below the line, broken and twisted into every conceivable shape. Luckily there were but few travellers, and when the worst cases had been attended to, and the sufferers taken to a neighbouring cottage, nothing remained to be done. What was there to do? Ah! news of the catastrophe would be certain to fly quickly, and Helen would hear of it. He would spare her any possible anxiety on his account. He would carry the first tidings himself. Then he remembered that he had been looking out to try and see the Château Y—, where his betrothed and her family resided, at the very moment of the crash. Yes, he was not far off. How fortunate that the accident should happen just then! Only a mile separated him from her house. He could go across country, and could hardly miss his way. So, forgetting his wounds, Bertram Wilde set out.

The rain was coming down now and obscured all objects. Never mind, he knew the direction pretty well. "How surprised they will be to see me so soon; and in such a state!" he thought. Just then he plunged into a narrow ditch separating two fields, and went up to his knees in water. It was not deep, and he soon waded across, and began striking over some stony soil, gradually rising. When he got to the top, he looked about for a few moments. Yes, he was going right, he thought. Was the sky getting brighter? Perhaps it was clearing up. No, the rain still beat down persistently. "I shan't mind a wetting after such an accident as that," said Bertram to himself; and now he passed under some trees, and came to a wall, leapt it, and found himself in a road. It led in the right direction, and thanking his stars, he began to move forward.

But the sky *was* getting brighter. He could see it through the

heavy boughs overhanging the path, and there was certainly a glow which he had not seen before. He walked a little now, and the light got brighter. Then it became more radiant, and he could see distinct pulsations of red blaze rising and falling on the midnight curtain of clouds. What did it mean? An Aurora? Not in these latitudes, on such a night. What was it? With quickly-beating heart he hastened on.

Another moment, and he was in view of, and close to the house that held what was dearest to him on earth. What a sight! Was he dreaming? Was this the effect of the accident upon his too highly-strained nerves? No. The villa was on fire, from basement to roof one flaming framework; windows, floors, and walls sending columns of nearly smokeless fire up to the sky, as only houses can do that have quantities of well-seasoned wood about them.

There was a beautiful creeper, a clematis, that used to hang in festoons over the porch, and there it was hanging still, charred and shrivelling in the fierce heat. That creeper had been watered every day by Helen's own hand. Where was *she* now? Pray Heaven, not within! He set off, with his heart throbbing against his ribs, at race-horse speed for the house.

Somebody was standing on the lawn in front of it. Bertie rushed across the soppy, fire-illuminated turf towards him. It was old Mr. Graham, Helen's father. I call him old, though in reality he was not more than sixty years; but he was prematurely aged, being a complete invalid, and had come abroad to the southern coast for the sake of his health. He was stooping down, trying with frantic impatience to raise a heavy ladder that lay along the ground; but evidently the task was too much for his feeble strength.

"Mr. Graham!" half shouted Bertram, as he dashed up to him.

"Wilde!" and Mr. Graham clasped his hands, and ejaculated "Thank Heaven! you are come. Helen!"

That name was enough for Bertie. He guessed all. Quick as lightning he had raised the ponderous ladder into the air, carried it across the gravel and reared it against the house, spite of columns of smoke pouring from the lower windows. Another moment, and he had sprung up the rounds, and was battling with the mingled flames and vapours that were pouring out of an upstairs room—Helen's room!

He sprang inside, although he knew from the amount of smoke and heat that he had only a few brief moments in which to do his work. Half suffocated, he tried to look round, and his eyesight failing him, he walked forward, feeling his way, when he stumbled against something lying on the floor. Another second, and he had lifted Helen's inanimate form in his arms, dashed to the window in a state of semi-madness from the effects of the heat and smoke, and put his foot on the top round of the ladder.

It was difficult work descending, weakened, scorched, and blinded as he was; and as he got within a foot of the ground he was seen

to drop his precious burden—luckily into Mr. Graham's arms—while he himself sank back heavily on the turf. The accumulated horrors of that eventful night had been too much even for his young and active frame. He had swooned away.

And Helen, was *she* still alive? Her father bore her tenderly to the lodge, helped by some among the country people who were now hurrying to the scene of the conflagration. There her mother was waiting, and that mother expended all her care and affection in tending the beautiful girl who had almost fallen a victim to the dreadful fate of death by fire; while Mr. Graham went back to look after Bertram Wilde.

Bertie was safe enough. It was not fated that he should perish either from railway accident, or the flames, or the fall from the ladder. His ailment chiefly consisted of burns and bruises, and was trifling compared with Helen's, who did not really recover from the shock and suffocation for some months after the terrible events of that night.

How the conflagration originated remains a mystery, though it was certain that it had begun in an upstairs room. In the old timber-built château the flames had spread with marvellous rapidity. Helen had been in her room, trying to catch a sight of Bertie's train through the window, and could not have been upstairs more than half an hour when she heard her father shouting, "Helen! Helen! come down for heaven's sake!"

She rushed to the door—this is what Bertie learnt from her afterwards—and on to the landing: but the flames already had hold of the staircase, and she was driven back into her room. There she made an effort to leap down from the window, but the height was too great, and she was afraid, and the gathering resinous smoke soon paralysed her; she stood at the open window calling to her father to fetch a ladder, and it was in this position that she remained to be overpowered by the deadening torpor of suffocation. The reader knows the rest.

Bertie says that railway accident was the luckiest event that ever happened to him. Had he gone on safely to Antibes, he could not have been at the Château Y—for full an hour more. In that time, what would or might have happened to Helen?

Of course inquiries were made as to the cause of the accident on the line. Nobody had been killed, but several persons badly injured. Eminent French engineers were of opinion that it arose from a defect in the rails just at that point. There was a grand gathering up of the scattered luggage, and Bertie was obliged to go into Antibes and claim his personal belongings. In the Commissary's room of the Gendarmerie offices, articles picked up from the wreck were spread out on a long table, to be claimed by their owners. Bertie was carelessly looking over this collection of treasure trove, when his eye lighted on a piece of jewellery.

"That ring," he said, and stretched out his hand to grasp it. It was gold, set with alternate diamonds and rubies.

"Does it belong to Monsieur?" asked the polite functionary guarding the treasures.

"No; but I think—in fact, I know the real owner."

"In that case," replied the official, "Monsieur must communicate with his friend; it must only be given up to the veritable owner."

"Do you know whereabouts it was found?" asked Bertie.

"It was found upon the rails, between two sleepers, just eight and a half metres from Antibes, where the lamentable accident occurred," answered the exact and logical-minded Frenchman.

"Ah! and has it been claimed yet?" asked Wilde.

"No, the ring has not been claimed," was the reply.

"I thought as much," remarked Bertie, as he turned away.

And the ring has never yet been claimed; nor could Bertie ever succeed in tracing its putative and presumptive owner, though he set the French police on his track. If Señor Basil Garcia reads this narrative, and wishes to claim his property, he has only to apply to the Chief Commissary of Police at Antibes, where he may perhaps hear of "something to his advantage"—perhaps not.

H. F. L.



FROM THE GERMAN.

Oh, wither quickly, wither soon,
Rose of the Alps, on mountain peak;
Ere yet the autumn winds have blown,
And swept the crimson from thy cheek!

Oh, wither quickly, wither soon,
Young heart, within me burning high;
Ere thou life's chilling frost hast known,
And seen thy blossoms droop and die!

A. H. D.

AN UNLUCKY RAID.

IN the good old days of the Bow Street runners, when highway assaults were rife, and solitary post-chaise travellers never journeyed without pistols in their pockets, and tremor at their hearts ; when strange feats in the shape of starlight robberies were boasted of, and a "Knight of the Road" aspired to be called a gentleman, the following incident occurred.

One afternoon in early autumn, close upon sunset, a couple of well-dressed men, driving a light gig in which was a poor jaded-looking horse, stopped at a wayside posting-inn, not a hundred miles from Bath, and requested accommodation for the night. They were fashionably attired, and spoke in condescending tones to the landlord and servants, using a few words now and again of town slang, as young bucks of the first water were proud to do in that day.

Giving the horse and gig over to the care of the ostler, they adjourned to the public room and called for some light refreshments in the shape of drink, ordering a supper to be served later. The landlord himself brought in the brandy-and-water.

"What's this story about a great highway robbery near here last night, landlord ?" questioned one. "We heard of it on the road, coming along. Is it true ?"

"Quite true, sir. Ah, gentlemen ! it is a dreadful thing—though clever, I must say. My Lady Cantifere with her two daughters was driving home across the heath an hour or two after midnight, having been to a ball, when their carriage was stopped by four mounted horsemen with cocked pistols. The old lady screamed and fainted ; the young ones screamed and kicked ; and the gentlemen, those audacious robbers, proceeded politely to rifle the ladies of every ornament they wore."

"Scoundrels !" interjected one of the guests.

"More than that, your worships. What should those bold blades do but invite the damsels to tread a measure with them ! It was a fine night, as you may perhaps remember, sirs ; the moonbeams shining bright on the bare heath. Out-of the coach they handed them, and footed it in a minuet ; dancing, it's said, to perfection, as though they were used to lead out the King's own daughters every night of their lives. The young ladies' screams ended in laughter ; the Baroness woke up from her faint and abused them all, robbers and daughters together. Oh, they are bold, those gentlemen of the highway !"

The two gentlemen, listening to this, had gone into bursts of laughter. "But what of the men-servants?—what were they doing?" spluttered one.

"Only two were in attendance, sirs, it seems; my lady's footman in the dickey, and the postillion on the horses; and while two of the robbers were thus doing their dancing, the other two stood guard over the men, each with his pistol cocked and his hand on the trigger, ready to fire at the least movement."

"And the upshot?"

"The young ladies were bowed into their coach again, all with stately ceremony, and the robbers, after wishing them a very courteous good night, rode off at a canter, with every jewel they had possessed, small or large, costly or simple, and my lady's purse into the bargain. They may well boast that they lead merry lives, those men! Fine commotion the news has caused round about us to-day, as you may imagine, gentlemen. Everybody's talking of it."

The landlord, being called for elsewhere, retired; the travellers sipped at their glasses, laughing away, and conversing with one another in an undertone. Dusk came on, and the elder and taller of the two addressed his friend in a different tone.

"About time to see after the horse, isn't it, Jim? It's dark enough."

"I was just going to," answered Jim. And draining his glass, he went away to the stable-yard.

Looking about him, with the air of a connoisseur, after watching his horse eat up its oats, he made himself acquainted with the arrangements of the stables. Some five or six horses were in them. In the box next to his own stood a splendid animal; evidently valuable.

"A better steed nor yours, sir!" cried the ostler from behind, in a quiet voice; and the gentleman gave a start, not thinking anybody was near.

"Ay; mine has seen good service, and he has been worked hard lately," answered the stranger, good-humouredly. "A very fine animal this, as you observe. And yet," stepping back to look critically at it, "were my horse in good condition it might not be much inferior to this. They are not altogether unlike: about the same height, and much the same in colour—brown."

With the last words, the stranger went back to the house, whistling. The ostler peered after him through the dusk while he made his comments.

"You have got a cheek, master, whoever you may be; and a impudent cheek it is. Going and comparing of the two horses like that! —this fifty-guinea beautiful animal, and that there wretched old hack o' theirs! What next? I wonder who they be, when they be at home?" And, with that, he locked the stable door.

"Well?" cried the elder traveller when the other one returned. "Any chance?"

"Never had a better chance in all our lives," was the answer, "In the next box to ours stands one of the grandest animals you ever saw

—same colour, same size, or about it; worth a little fortune. And a set of silver-mounted harness hanging up by him."

"Silver-mounted?"

"Think so. Looks like it. We have got a rich chance, I tell you, Wade."

Supper was announced in due time, and the two hungry men did justice to it. Afterwards they sat over the fire, with pipes and grog, and retired to their room about eleven o'clock.

The room, a double-bedded one, was not exactly on the ground floor, but it was not much higher. A few steps leading off from the staircase conducted to it. The travellers had chosen it in preference to one at first assigned them on the second floor; one of them observing that he liked to sleep near the ground in case a fire broke out in the night, of which he had a peculiar dread.

The first thing they did on entering the chamber was to double-lock the door and put the candle out; the second was to softly open the window, to stretch their necks out of it as far as they conveniently could, and to wish the moonlight was "hanged."

"Nothing of a drop, that," observed Wade, measuring with his eye the space to the ground. "A child might jump it. Shut down the window, Jim, and let's have a pipe. Hang that moon again! I thought you were wrong in foretelling it would be a dark night."

Shutting the window as softly as he had opened it, Jim and his friend, each taking a short, well-worn pipe from his pocket, sat down to smoke. From another pocket came forth a flask of some kind of liquor. Thus they made themselves comfortable, and seemed to forget all about bed.

At any rate, neither of them attempted to go to it. They sat on, and smoked, and drank at the flask occasionally, and whispered together in hushed tones. At last the clock struck two. One of them rose, drew aside the window curtain and looked out.

A suppressed shout of exultation broke from him. "Wade, Wade! the night has changed. It's raining, and the moon is gone. I knew rain was coming."

"Man alive, don't make that row," retorted the other. "We don't want the house woke up."

Putting away their pipes and flasks, they opened the window with crafty gentleness, and dropped down on the ground outside it, one after the other. The night was very dark, no light, or glimmer of it, was to be seen anywhere.

Making their way round cautiously to the coach-house and stables, Jim produced a master key which undid the locks. The stable door he undid was the one that had the valuable horse in it; and he was surprised to find what an easy lock it was. Then, while the other man kept watch, he hastily and noiselessly attached the horse to their own gig, using the harness he had admired so greatly. The rain was dashing down smartly, which tended to deaden other

sounds. When all was ready, they cautiously led the horse and gig out of the yard, and to a distance beyond it, got in, and drove away at a spanking pace.

So far they were well-satisfied with their night's work, and congratulated themselves on the valuable prize they had captured in the horse and harness. It's true the horse appeared to require the whip pretty frequently, and Jim, who was driving, did not fail to administer it.

"Lazy beggar! he has stuffed himself out with corn," cried he. "You shall fast all this day, my gentleman, and that will bring you into working order. What a pelt it is!" looking up at the pouring rain. "Should say this was the clearing shower."

"What'll the job bring us in, Jim?"

"Twenty pounds, clear, I reckon. And an old hack thrown in to complete the bargain."

On the heath now, they began laughing over the past night's adventure there, as related to them by the landlord. They had no fear of the highwaymen themselves, not they: such gentry do not prey upon one another.

"Hang it, Jim! can't you drive faster?" cried Wade, suddenly.

Jim made no answer. He was beginning to feel somewhat puzzled; for, unless he was greatly mistaken, the beautiful horse betrayed unmistakable signs of giving in. Their own wretched animal could do as well as this. Presently it stopped; stopped dead from exhaustion.

"What the devil's the matter with him?" demanded Wade.

"Be shot if I know. He seems dead beat. It's so dark one can see nothing. Wish that moon would come out!—the rain has ceased."

"Well, this is a pretty go!" exclaimed the other, as the horse, in spite of whip and word, refused to move. "Brought up, before one's half beyond danger, with a stolen horse! You must have been mistaken in the worth of the animal, Jim: never knew you mistake one before."

"It beats me hollow," returned Jim, his crestfallen tone betraying some alarm. "As to being mistaken in him, I know I never was; there. Something extraordinary must ail the horse."

He jumped out of the gig and began feeling the animal with his hands. At the same moment the coy moon burst out from behind the clouds and shone down in all her splendour. Jim felt the horse, stared at it, and stared again. The other one in the gig was also gazing curiously. Simultaneously a shout of dismay, followed by an imprecation, burst from both of them. *They had stolen their own horse.*

Some mutual recrimination ensued. Wade accusing Jim of having made a mistake and opened the wrong stable; Jim vowing by all that's blue that he had opened the right one.

"Anyway, we've got the harness," pleaded Jim.

The remark caused Wade to turn his eyes on it; its silver points were glittering in the moonlight. A closer glance, and then another angry shout broke from him.

"Look here, you fool—here's a *crest*."

"Hey—what?" cried Jim, turning round.

Sure enough: the silver-mounted harness bore a family crest with its Latin motto, and could no doubt be identified anywhere. Certainly this night's anticipated spoil was not lucky in any way.

Next morning the landlord of the inn was intensely surprised at the disappearance of the travellers, and at the spiriting away of some harness that belonged to the young Viscount Dare. He stood in the stable-yard talking with his ostler.

"But for me his lordship's hoss would ha' gone too," cried the ostler stolidly. "When I see one o' they two gents a poking and peering about here last night under cover o' the dusk, and see him gazing at the fine animal with hungry eyes, and next watched him a fingering the stable-lock, it struck me what he might be after—the wanting to have a try at changing their own sorry hack for this one. So the last thing at night, before turning in, I changed the hosses; putting theirein in the best stable, and t'other here, and made him safe with my bar and padlock which can't be picked. And they've just been and gone away with their own."

"Why didn't you change the harness as well?"

"Well, I never thought o' the harness."

But in the course of the day a messenger brought the harness back—and did not wait to ask for that of the travellers.

So the landlord, by the bargain, got a set of plain harness, which really was not bad, and he let the unlucky thieves alone.



THE EARLY RAIN.

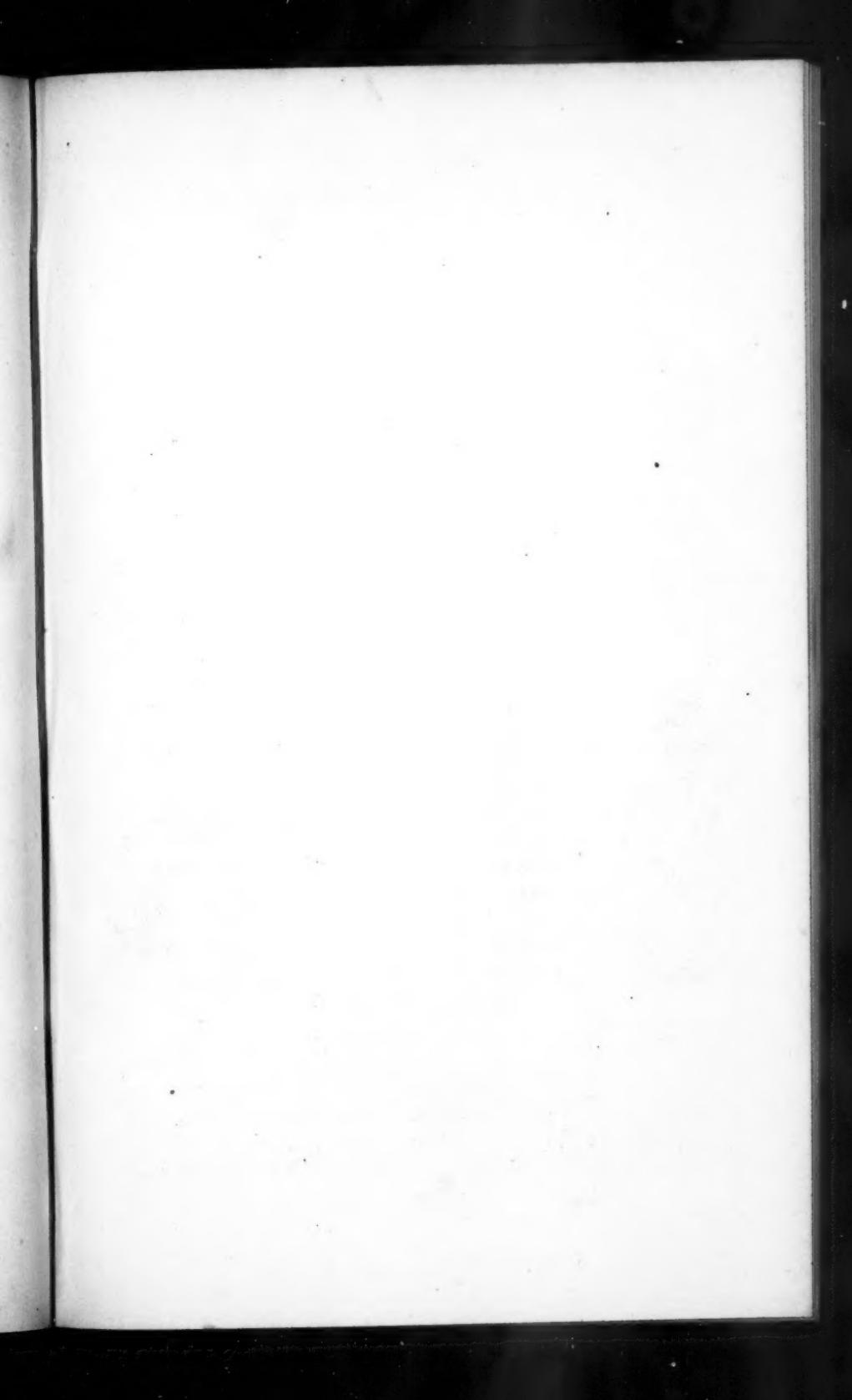
Down through the misty air,
 Down from the gloom above,
 Falling, pattering everywhere,
 The rain comes quick with love.
 Softly the missel-thrush
 Sings in the golden storm ;
 The robin under a laurel bush
 Waits for to-morrow morn.

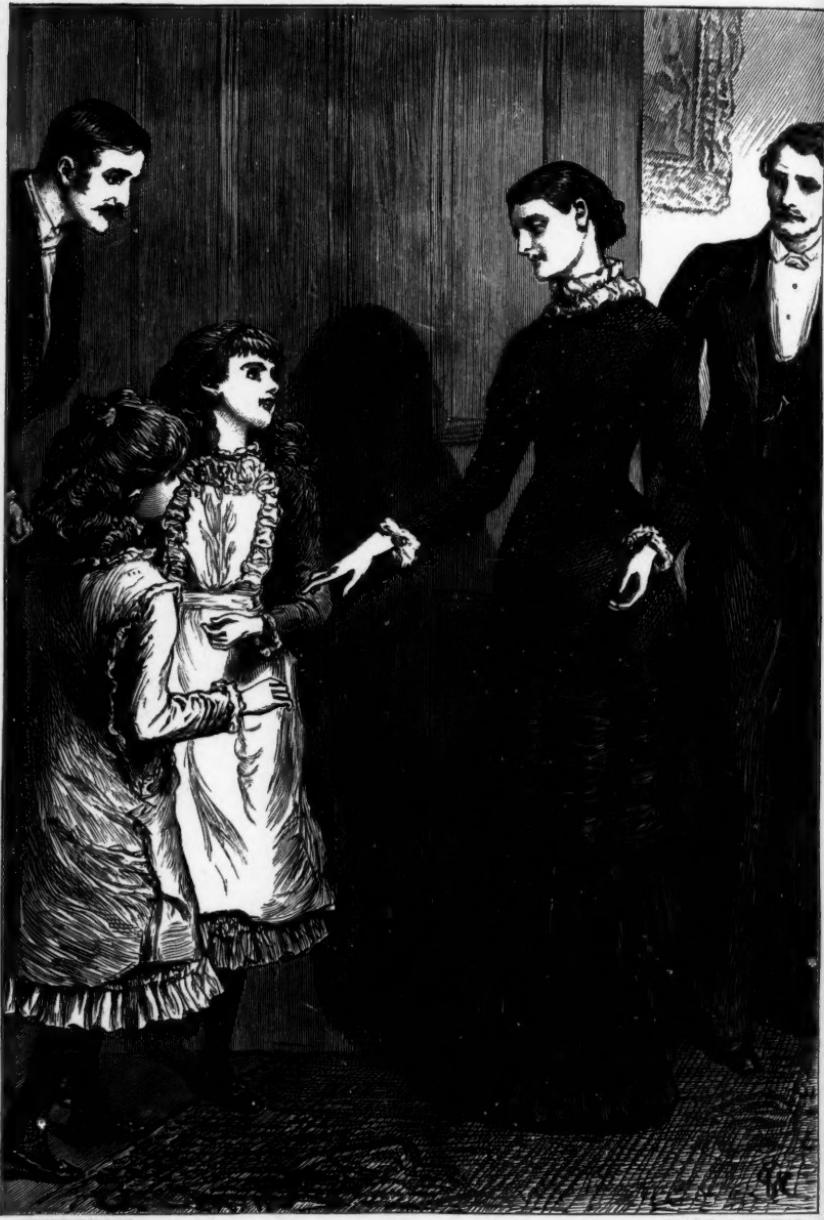
Drip, drip, drip from the eaves,
 Pit, pit, pit on the pane,
 Swish, swish, swish on the drenched leaves,
 List ! 'tis the song of the rain.
 Grasses are bending low,
 Green is the corn and thick ;
 You can almost see the nettles grow,
 They grow so strong and quick.

Soft is the wind from the west,
 Softer the rain's low sigh ;
 The sparrow washes his smoky breast,
 And watches the gloomy sky.
 Stirred are the boughs by the breeze,
 Scarcely a leaf is still,
 Something is moving among the trees
 Like a restless spirit of ill.

Standing watching the rain,
 Do you not seem to hear
 The voice of God outspeaking again
 To man's ungrateful ear ?
 Promising plenty and peace,
 Garners with treasure heaped,
 That seedtime and harvest shall not cease
 Till the Harvest of Earth be reaped.

J. T. BURTON WOLLASTON.





ROBERT BARNES.

R. AND E. TAYLOR.

"AND NOW WE MUST GO TO OUR LESSONS," SAID ALICE CLEARE.